

VOLUME  
NUMBER 11

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

NOVEMBER  
1954

TALU'S FAN BY JOHN YORK CABOT

# fantastic ADVENTURES

WHEN FREEMEN  
SHALL STAND  
BY NELSON S. BOND

NOVEMBER  
25c



TELL-TALE FLAKES?

ITCHY SCALP?

UGLY SCALES?

# LOOK OUT FOR INFECTIOUS DANDRUFF!

start NOW with LISTERINE!



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# Fantastic

## ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

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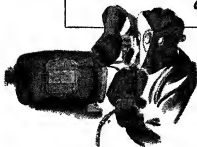
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VOLUME 4  
NUMBER 11



# The Memory of an Atom



Can The Past  
Be Awakened--  
--and THE PURPOSE OF  
OUR LIVES KNOWN?

**WERE THE ANCIENTS RIGHT?** Does the whirling heart of an atom contain the secret of the universe? If everything from a grain of sand to the mighty stars—including man—is composed of atoms, do these particles contain the infinite intelligence which ordained and directs all things? Shall man at last find within them his true purpose in the scheme of things?

Before the powerful cyclotron that now smashes atoms to expose their hidden interior—even before the telescope and microscope—men of nature in the ancient world disclosed secrets of her phenomena, the mysteries of life and death. These teachings have become the foundations of thought which have raised men to heights of achievement and happiness.

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Use the coupon opposite for the free sealed book, "The Mastery of Life." It will tell you how you may receive, for study and use, this centuries-old, but ever modern information.

Scribe E. J. E.  
The Rosicrucians (AMORC)  
San Jose, California, U. S. A.

Please send me your free book, "The Mastery of Life," which I shall read as directed. This does not obligate me in any way.

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# The Editor's Notebook

## A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

**T**HE other day we met a bald eagle and got to talking. So after we shot the bull for a while, the eagle got to telling about things that happened in his youth. Said he: "When I was a big shaver, I remember one day . . ."

"What's that you said?" we asked. "What's this 'big shaver' business?"

"Oh, didn't you know?" he asked in amazement. "We bald eagles are heavier than our parents during the first year of our existence. So naturally, I could hardly call myself a 'little shaver' like you humans do."

And that's the truth. Bald eagles weigh more than their parents during the first year of their life. Which is a good fantastic fact to start this usually un-fantastic column off with. Incidentally, it's now started, and the rest is on your heads!

**S**EEING as how this is an editorial column, maybe we'll do a little editorializing (a crime in any dictionary!) and spill a few random thoughts about this war debt business. We remember a story that ran several years back in this magazine about a little guy who went to Olympus. Maybe you remember it too. Anyway, the big shot god, Zeus, or Jupiter, had a swell system. Every Monday morning he tore up all the I. O. U.'s of the whole nation. You see, everybody paid for the things they bought with these little slips of paper. Got into an enormous pile of debt, lived the life of Utopia with everything money can buy, and then started out the new week from scratch, clear of debt. It worked swell, and everybody was happy.

**N**OW, why all this fuss about how we're going to have to continue paying wartime taxes long after the peace to pay for the war? It seems to us all these war bonds we're buying are just like those I. O. U. slips. The first Monday after the war, why don't we and the government (that's us too) get together and tear up a lot of paper? We tear up our bonds, the government tears up our tax papers. Sure, we're all broke, but we start off without a burden of taxes that'll last for decades, and cause our children to curse us. But we'll have a heck of a lot of things to repair, work to do, and prosperity to fiddle around with. The Monday after the paper-tearing Monday, we'll get a pay check that we can keep. It won't go for taxes. And doggone, we won't be broke!

Or maybe this is all too fantastic, or too sensible, for a bunch of short-necked *civilized* makers who count blood in dollars and life in wars.

**T**HIS is the issue in which you get your first full-length novel rather than a serial. It's a grand story too. Nelson S. Bond's "When Freedom Shall Stand." Bond has packed a lot of power and significance into this story, in addition to having written a swell story with all the action and plot and human beings his stories usually have, and we insist on.

**R**OBERT FUQUA illustrated it for us, and he's done a job that is certainly in keeping with the tone of the story itself. H. W. McCauley contributed one of his gorgeous Mac Girls to the story in the form of the cover. This is the first time McCauley has painted a woman of another planet. All we can say is, "On to Venus!"

**C**LEE GARSON, a newcomer to our pages, rather tickled us with his little short in this issue. "Sharbeau's Startling Statue" might make you think this is just another one of those "living statue" stories until you get to the last few paragraphs. Then you're going to find out you were wrong. This story has what we need in these war-tortured times. A little chuckle, and a little reality.

**S**OMETIMES we wonder why the world doesn't laugh more, and then we realize it's because a character like Lefty Feep doesn't come along every day. When one does, he's mighty valuable property, and we're proud to have the exclusive rights to Robert Bloch's sensational creation. As for the current story, "The Golden Opportunity of Lefty Feep," no need to say more than turn to page 106 and begin laughing.

**D**O you remember the stories and movies depicting an English nobleman out hunting with his falcon and how the majestic bird would swoop down from the sky to capture a pigeon? Well, these falcons will soon be "rubbed out" if English army officials have their way. They have issued orders to hunters to shoot down these wild falcons and destroy their nests found along the coasts of Britain.

The falcons "signed" their own death warrant when they continued to capture the carrier pigeons

used by R.A.F. patrol planes to communicate with their land bases.

ON Thursday, the sixth of August, our popular author, Dwight V. Swain, married Margaret Simpson in Chicago, Illinois. Congratulations, Dwight, and the best of luck. Any man who can write stories that have our readers raving right from the beginning ought not to have much trouble making a girl rave over him. Confidentially, Mrs. Swain, you got something there!

As a sort of wedding celebration, this issue presents another of Dwight's stories, and we think it's an especially fine one. It was written around an illustration by Magarian, and is called "Shay-la's Garden." Incidentally, how can a guy get married after writing a story like this? We'd be scared to death!

JOHN YORK CABOT does another novelet for us this month, also based on a Magarian illustration. It's "Tale's Fan." The illustration is something new and different for our pages, and so is the story. It has that element of fantasy that only true fantasy seems to have. An eerie sense of the Fates and how they are tied to human destiny. This always makes the skin crawl on the back of our necks, somehow. But the story has its elements of real fantastic action too. You'll find a clever balance here.

TRUST Stanton A. Coblenz to come up with an unusual idea. This time he's got visitors from another world. And to us, their only value and only use is in the making of synthetic rubber. We imagine if we visited Mars, and they decided to make rubber out of us, we'd resent it too. Anyway, there are some unusual developments in this story when the rubber making gets under way.

HERE'S a strange little fact we discovered. No longer will a music composer have to stop in the midst of his train of thought and write down the chords of music he has composed. Patent number 2,214,948 issued to William F. Allen, Jr., of Seaford, Del., and Edward J. Clark of Camden, N. J., covers a device to do away with these unnecessary interruptions.

The mechanism automatically writes down the notes on music paper as the composer plays his new song in a permanent and perfectly legible form.

IF an air raid warden tells you to put out your light, be sure to do so at once and you will be saving both you and your city a lot of trouble and annoyance.

You may think that a match or a small flashlight couldn't possibly be seen, but this is far from true. The results of experiments conducted in countries now under aerial bombardment to determine the dangers of blackout violations are

very enlightening. They reveal that a single lighted match can be seen a half mile away, a lantern for a mile and a quarter, and a window of a fully lighted room twelve and a half miles away during a blackout.

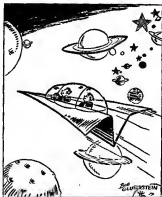
So you can see why you shouldn't smoke or show any light at all on the street during a raid, for Mr. Jerry in his bomber would like nothing better.

AS a part of his initiation rites, the prospective Tibetan lama must spend three years, three months, three days, and three hours in a cave without being able to see or talk to another human being for the entire period. This part of the initiation was probably put in to keep any women from getting any ideas of becoming a lama.

ACCORDING to Dr. John A. Miller, of Ohio State University, mosquito wigglers can be induced to commit suicide very easily. From force of habit, the mosquito wigglers always go where they can obtain the most light. For this reason the young mosquitoes always rise to the top of a body of water in the daytime and at the same time get the air they need for their existence.

However, Dr. Miller found that if the top of the pool is darkened and a light is placed at the bottom, the young mosquitoes will go to the bottom of the pool and stay there until they all die of suffocation. Thus, Dr. Miller concluded that the young mosquitoes go to the surface of the pool, not to get air as is commonly believed, but to reach the light that has attracted them.

(Continued on page 192)



"They wouldn't take us kids seriously, eh?"

# WHEN FREEMEN

by  
NELSON S.  
BOND



"THAT," said Stephen Duane, is that!" He wiped his hands on an acid-stained apron, turned to his assistant. "We all set now, Chuck? Got the stuff?"

"Right here, Lootenant."

"What? What's that you called me?" Stephen Duane's voice flattened.

"I said—" Chuck began.

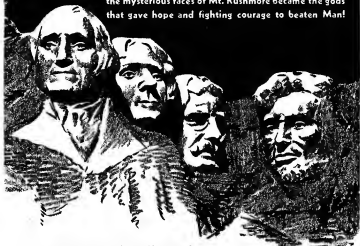
"I heard you. Chuck, for Pete's

Mt. Rushmore was the  
Mecca of this future world

R. Fuylo—

# SHALL STAND

Earth was conquered and Venus was her master. But the mysterious faces of Mt. Rushmore became the gods that gave hope and fighting courage to beaten Man!



sake, won't you lay off that 'Lieutenant' nonsense? I've got a front handle; one you've been using for three years. What's the matter? Don't you like it any more?"

Chuck Lafferty shrugged. "Them," he said patiently, "was the good old days. But times has changed. We're in the Army now. You've got bars on your shoulders—remember?—and I'm just a sergeant. Which makes a difference."

"Nuts!" snorted Steve. "I'm still a chemist, Chuck, and you're my lab assistant. And so far as you're concerned, I'm still just plain old Steve Duane. Get it?"

"Yeah. Yeah, sure, Lootenant."

"*Wka-a-at?*"

"I mean, yeah, sure—er—Steve."

"That's better. Now, let's get to work on the final experiment. If this gas does what I *think* it will, World War II is going to end all of a sudden, and a madman named Hitler is going to be caught with his *panzers* down. Let's find out. Bring that flask over here while I get one of the guinea pigs from the cage. Put it on the— Wait a minute! Who left that door open?"

Chuck, gingerly lifting a small, stoppered vial from its shockproof rack, glanced over his shoulder wonderingly.

"Not me!" he denied. "I always make sure it's shut. Maybe the guard outside—?"

"Well, whoever did it," frowned Duane, "must be more careful. Our country's at war, and there's been entirely too much enemy sabotage and espionage around these parts already! You outside there! Guard!"

A khaki-clad figure appeared in the doorway, saluted smartly.

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

"Close that door, soldier, and see that it's kept—say! What is this, anyway? Why the gas-mask?"

The guard's voice was weirdly muffled by his rubbery face covering.

"Orders, sir. Total blackout and mock gas attack in fifteen minutes, sir. All men on duty have been ordered into masks, sir."

"So?" Steve Duane stared at the guard thoughtfully. "Well, in that case, you may resume your post. But this time close the door carefully. Oh, and by the way, soldier—"

He spoke with studied casualness as the guard turned away. The other man glanced back.

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

"You might be kind enough to—*Achtung!*"

HIS voice shifted abruptly from a tone of easy camaraderie to one of sharp command. It was an old ruse—but it worked! Reflexes conditioned into the soldier's body through long years of training exercised themselves. The man's heels clicked together, his frame stiffened.

On that instant, his suspicion verified, Steve Duane hurled himself forward.

"I thought so!" he roared. "A spy at our very door, eh? Grab him, Chuck!"

But the room was wide, and the Nazi spy had realized his mistake the

moment he made it. He, too, swept into swift action. A tug wrenched the .44 from his holster; impetuously he ripped the mask from his face to reveal eyes gleaming with fanatic determination. Malice thickened the heretofore well-concealed guttural accent which bespoke his ancestry.

"Stop! Another step, *Leutnant*, and you die! We are alone here. That has been arranged. We are not so foolishly overconfident as you stupid Americans. *Ja*—" He laughed—"it was I, Erich von Rath, who opened the door, the better to watch your progress, hear your braggart claims. *Zu*, you have a new weapon to end the war, *nicht wahr*? But our *Fuehrer* is the one who will use that weapon. Now—" He swung the ugly muzzle of his automatic to bear on Chuck Lafferty—"bring me the vial! Quickly, *bitte!* I have no time to waste—"

Dazed by the sudden turn of events, Chuck faltered a half step forward, stopped, turned questioning eyes to Duane. Steve nodded imperceptibly. His quick mind had appraised the gravity of the situation, found but one slim chance of coming out on top.

To take the flask from Lafferty's hand the Nazi must for a split second, at least, relax his guard. It was narrow figuring, but if in that second he could move . . .

"Go ahead, Chuck. Give it to him," he ordered.

"B-but—" hesitated Chuck.

"Give it to him!"

The enemy agent laughed coarsely. "Your *Leutnant* is no fool. A coward, yes; but, then, all Americans are cowards at heart, *nein*? Bring the flask here! *Ach*—be careful, you blundering *eisel!*"

The last sentence broke in a gasp from von Rath. He was not the only one to shout warning. Steve's fearful

voice echoed his cry.

"Good Lord, Chuck, be careful! Don't drop that! We will all be—look out! Be care—"

*The cold sweat of sudden fear broke on his forehead. Not fear of his foe-man, but of what might now seize them all. Even as he shouted, the glass shattered upon the floor. From it rose a pale, chill, ominous mist. A sharp, unidentifiable odor assailed his nostrils; black vertigo staggered him. The world reeled and tumbled into wells of seething darkness; the darkness was peopled with gray, swirling phantasms; he sensed motion within and about him; a multitude of half-heard sounds rolled like surging waters past his ears. This for a fearful moment. Then:*

"—ful!" he cried. "That's dangerous, Chuck—"

HIS hands groped forward, governed by an instinctive motion, to catch the falling flask. But, amazingly, they met and clutched nothing! More frightening still, the muscles of his well-knit, athletic body flamed with sudden agony, racked in protest as if they had been welded for months in a plaster cast.

Over straining sinews and bones that ached horribly, Lieutenant Stephen Duane had no more control than has a month old baby. With a gasp more of shock than of fear, he pitched headlong to his knees, his chest, his elbows.

He tried to roll, that his shoulders might break his fall, and succeeded in a measure, but concrete grated against one cheek painfully. The jolt shook him like the impact of a sledgehammer. He spat dry dust flavored with the warm, salty taste of blood and cried again:

"Chuck! Chuck, what—?"

Then the paralysis which had held him lessened; with an effort he lifted

his head and stared about him, eyes stark with incomprehension.

The laboratory was gone! The bright-gleaming lights had vanished, as had the rows upon rows of glistening beakers and retorts . . . the workbenches and hooded range . . . the centrifuge and tubes and hissing Bunsens . . . the vast intricate array of chemical paraphernalia that should be here . . . all were gone!

There was only this dingy, windowless room, bare and musty, lighted by the feeble flames of candles guttering upon worn wall-sconces.

A sense of panic fear tugged at Steve Duane's heart. He cried yet again, "Chuck! Chuck Lafferty! Where are you?"

The answer came from behind him. Drowsily at first, as if the speaker were wakening to respond from the depths of drug-numbed slumber, then more coherently, the answer gaining speed like the disc of a hand-started phonograph.

"—grab it, Steve! It slipped! Look out! The gas is escap—"

Steve turned just in time to see his subordinate and lab assistant strain frozen muscles forward in futile attempt to stay the fall of a non-existent bottle. Chuck's eyes were open, but their blankness mirrored nothing. He was toppling, as grotesquely as had Duane a moment before, to the floor.

Clenching his lips against the pain that flooded him with every motion, Steve inched forward to cushion his chum's fall. Chuck's body, locked as if in *rigor mortis*, was a dead weight. Not only that, but—a sudden realization heightened Steve's sense of eerie—cold!

Chuck's body was cold! Not with the soft clamminess of a drugged or shellshocked invalid, but with the all-pervading iciness of carved marble!

But stiff or limber, cold or quick, Lafferty's white lips were moving. And they framed Steve's own query.

"Steve—what happened? Where are we? And what are we doing *here*?"

Steve said, "Flex your fingers, chum. That's right; work 'em. Yeah, I know it hurts, but it unfreezes 'em. Now, try moving those knees and elbows."

CHUCK performed, obediently, the exercises Steve had found loosened his own rigid body. Soon he, too, was able to lift his head and stare about him. He turned to his superior officer, but Steve's shake of the head answered his questions before they were given voice.

"I don't know, Chuck. It's all—fantastic! What's the last thing you remember? Before you woke up, I mean."

"Woke up?" repeated Lafferty wonderingly. "I wasn't even asleep. What do you mean, woke—?"

"That," commented Steve queerly, "is what *you* think! You weren't asleep, eh? Well, take a look at the hunk of statuary behind you."

Chuck turned and gulped. "The—*the Jerry!*"

"Right! That's what *you* looked like, chum, a moment ago. And me, too, I suppose. But I wouldn't know about that, and I wasn't on deck to watch myself unfreeze—as he's doing right now. Catch him, Chuck!"

"The hell with him!" said Chuck. "Let him break his dirty Nazi neck!" But he obeyed. The German woke blubbering with pain and fright, howled for mercy when he discovered his hands no longer held a weapon of destruction. But no thought of vengeance motivated Steve at the moment; his sole interest was in learning what weird fate had befallen them. There was time and enough to handle their enemy

as he deserved; now the problem was to find out what had happened. Therefore he gave the German the benefit of his advice, and in a short time the three erstwhile "statuettes" sat staring at each other in dim perplexity.

"This is not peace between us," he warned the German agent. "Only a truce until we find out what's happened. One false move, and—" He stopped significantly; then, to Chuck, "All right, Chuck. Your story. You were saying—?"

"I don't know," wailed Lafferty, "from nothing! All I know is that just a couple of minutes ago you ordered me to hand this lug a flask of that new anesthetic we were working on. I—I stumbled, and the flask slipped from my hands. As I fell, I tried to grab it—"

"And I yelled, 'Be careful!'"

"That's right. And then—and then all at once here I was, stiff as a board and falling flat on my puss. In *this* place—whatever it is! Steve—" Chuck stared at the young officer fearfully—"you don't think we—we're *dead*, do you? I mean, maybe the gas asphyxiated us, or something—?"

"If we are," stated Duane bluntly, "my Sunday-school teacher had the wrong steer on the afterworld. I *hurt* when I came to. And disembodied spirits don't have nervous systems; not that I know of. Anyhow, have you noticed your clothes?"

Chuck did, now, for the first time. He stared, then fingered wildly at the apparel in which he was clad. Perhaps unclad would be more apt. For his garments—like those worn by Steve and the spy—consisted of a metal harness about the loins, a short, metal-cloth cape suspended from the shoulders, and a pair of doeskin sandals.

He gasped, "Hell's bells, Steve! Superman duds!"



"Except," pointed out Duane, "that Superman, even in his balmiest days, never decked himself out in cloth like the stuff we have on! Don't you recognize the metal?"

CHUCK squinted more closely at the material of which their garments were woven, then: "Gold!" he croaked. "Solid gold! Sweet Moses, Steve, now I know I'm off my nut! I drop a flask of gas, draw a blank—and snap out of it flopping on my pan with 18 karat panties on! What makes here? A gag?"

"It's no gag," said Steve soberly. "I don't pretend to know all the answers, Chuck, but there are several facts I can deduce from what I see in this room. The first one is—our new gas worked."

"W-worked?"

"Better," nodded Steve, "or worse than we ever dared hope. There's only one logical explanation for the situation we find ourselves in. You dropped the flask, the anesthetic knocked us out, slowing down our basal metabolism—according to my expectations—and we fell into a state of catalepsy."

"That is why our muscles were stiff, our bodies cold and our joints rigid. Our minds recognized no lapse of time. That does not mean there has been none. All of our functions—breathing, digestion, elimination—have been slowed." He turned to the third member of their party. "Can you remember what happened? You were farthest from the fumes. You—Hey! What do you think you're doing? Come back here!"

Von Rath had been inching away from them stealthily. Now, well out of arm's reach, he leaped suddenly to his feet, raced toward a doorway at the far side of the chamber.

"A trick, *nein*? You are trying to

make me reveal my *Vaterland's* secrets? You don't catch me in your dirty, democratic trap. I—"

His words ended with the same dramatic suddenness as his headlong flight. For as if stricken by lightning, all at once he dropped to the floor and lay still! Blood burst from his nose and mouth.

In a flash, the two Americans were at his side. Awe weighted Chuck Lafferty's words.

"Goddemighty, what hit him? He went down just like he was pole-axed, Steve!"

But Steve, having satisfied himself that the spy was only unconscious, had already found the answer. He swept his hands before him, felt cool smoothness beneath their palms.

"Glass!" he said. "A solid wall of it! We're caged like animals under a bell!"

"What?" Lafferty, too, pawed wildly at the crystal-cool invisibility that bound them. "But air, Steve! There's air coming through somewhere—"

Duane's questing eyes had found the answer.

"Up there," he said. "See—near the ceiling? It's a wide crack in the glass. Chuck, I'm beginning to piece the puzzle together. It's mad, but it all ties in."

"That crack up there may be the thing that caused us to waken! From the appearance of this chamber, it used to be hermetically sealed! Then the dome split, air seeped in, and we awakened. But if that is true, what has seemed to us but a second's time may in reality have been weeks . . . years . . ."

"Years!"

"Possibly," warned Steve, "longer than that! It was experimental work we were engaged in, Chuck. *Methioprone* was a compound about which nothing was known. Set yourself for

a shock. While we slept, not only years but centuries may have passed!"

"Centuries!" echoed Lafferty bleakly. "B-but, Steve—the war? Who won? And where are we now? How—?"

Steve Duane shook his head.

"You know as much about that as I do. I'm guessing, anyway. There may be another explanation. But—" His head turned—"I think we'll know the answer in a few minutes."

"Eh? What do you mean? How?"

"Because," replied Steve tautly, "unless my ears are deceiving me, we're about to entertain guests. I heard footsteps coming down the outer corridor a moment ago, and—see? Now the door is opening!"

## CHAPTER II

### Priestess Beth

WHAT manner of men Steve Duane expected to see enter the cavernous chamber, he could not have really told. Men of a future era—for by now he was firmly convinced that it was a future era in which he and his companions had roused—might differ from men of the Twentieth Century in great or in no degree. He could even conceive of looking upon members of the long-heralded race of supermen, and was fully prepared to greet such arrivals.

This presumptuous logic, based on hunch, was typical of Duane. Unorthodox, perhaps—but it was this high, swift, imaginative quality of thought which had set him apart as one of his country's ablest young chemical engineers. If hunches like these occasionally led him to error, more often they led him to success in fields where others had failed.

But this time his surmise was com-

pletely wrong. For it was no lofty-browed race of supercultured beings who stepped through the doorway. It was, instead—

"Babes!" choked Chuck Lafferty. "Holy cow—dolls!"

"Quiet!" breathed Steve swiftly. But he, too, gazed at the corps of newcomers with numb astonishment. Women they were—but *what* women! Steve Duane was a scientist. As such he had allotted no place in his scheme of life for the weaker sex. But he knew now, in a single blinding moment, that this was only because never before had he looked upon such a woman as she who headed this group.

From the top of her dust-golden head to the soles of her doeskin sandals she was perfection. Tawny hair, shorn to shoulder-length, cascaded down over firm neck and shoulders to frame features strong with dignity and grace. Breast-cups of filigreed gold highlighted the smooth, golden sheen of her flesh. From beneath the folds of a sarong-like loincloth her long, straight limbs carried her forward in pantherine grace.

Her manner was at once imperious and oddly humble as she led the way to the dais upon which Steve and Chuck stood. Approaching them, she intoned a curious chant in a voice warm and mellow as the dimly-heard thrum of harpstrings.

With an effort, Steve wrenched his eyes away, and in a whisper warned, "Steady, Chuck! Don't move a muscle. It's dark in this corner. Hold the pose you were frozen in before we woke. They may not notice our change of position, or him. We'll play 'possum . . . try to learn something about . . ."

Then he stopped in obedience to his own command, and held himself rigidly motionless as the tiny band drew

nearer. He saw, now, that not all of the group shared the delicacy of the dust-golden Diana who led them. Only one other—and she a maid of thirteen or fourteen—wore the kirtle and peculiar amulet which he judged to be a badge of office.

The others fell into types as sharply diverse as day and night. First, waddling meekly behind the chieftain, came a huddle of pale and flabby-fleshed matrons, grossly obese of figure, flaccid of breast, vacant of eye. These moved with a slow, tantalizing undulation of hip and thigh which disgusted rather than enticed Steve.

Encircling these, tense as fighting falcons, marched the second distinctive type. No weakling billows of fat were these, but lean, hard warriors, granite-jawed, with eyes that stared straight forward in uncompromising challenge.

These Amazons wore no gold-cloth habiliments. Their breachcloths were of coarse, sweat-stained leather, and their flat, dry, masculine breasts were stifled beneath straitlaced halters, giving freedom of movement to their sword arms.

A THIRD type brought up the rear. Neither masculine nor cloyingly feminine were these. They might have been dull husks of neuter gender for all the physical emotion the sight of their thick, peasant bodies aroused. Their flesh was dark with long exposure to burning sun and driving sleet, they had gnarled, calloused fingers and strong, broad wrists.

They were heavy of jowl and brow, their stringy hair was crudely hacked to the neck-line, then caught in a clubbed knot. Aprons of shoddy felt were their only garments. Their legs bulged, sturdy and asensual as limestone pediments, from beneath these grimy skirts.

This much Steve Duane saw with growing wonder. Then the band drew still nearer, and the chant of the golden Diana became audible.

At first the words meant nothing. They were part of an intoned, indistinguishable blur, signifying nothing. Then suddenly—as if one strophe of a sacred ritual had ended and another begun—the chant slowed. Halting words emerged from the meaningless drone—and it was no longer meaningless. As one mesmerized, Steve hearkened incredulously to the chant of the dust-gold maiden.

*"Osé, can you see by the Duans' surly light—"*

The American national anthem! Steve's eyes narrowed in dazed bewilderment. Francis Scott Key's immortal words—immortal indeed!—but phrased all wrong, curiously accented, broken in the wrong places! Behind him, Chuck emitted a tiny gasp, but it went unnoticed as the voice of the cantor lifted sonorously.

*"—the rockets' red glare-bombs bursting in air—"*

There it was again! The right words, or right syllables, but improperly cadenced so that the whole true meaning of the song was distorted! Holding his peace was the hardest task Steve Duane had ever undertaken. Every fretful instinct urged him to interrupt this grotesquely mangled hymn.

But it was wiser, reason warned him, to just listen. Listen and learn more. The girl had lifted her head now, and was looking directly at him. A mist of reflected candlelight enmeshed her hair with a halo of golden glory. And there was radiance in her eyes, too; a bright, high burning, with which was somehow strangely mingled desperation and—hope! Liquid fire flamed in her throbbing voice.

*"Osé, does that star-spangled banner*

*yet wave*

*O'er the land, O, Thou Free? Or  
Thy hoam, O, Thou Brave?"*

The last note of the chant dwindled into silence. A strange, strained, watchful hush settled over the little band of women as if they were waiting for—for what? Steve Duane did not know. A manifestation of some sort? Quite possibly. It was perfectly obvious by now that to these women, for some obscure reason, he and his companions were objects of worship. The glass-encased dais upon which they stood was an altar—a shrine!

But—Lord! If this were so, for how many countless decades or centuries had they been immured here? What mighty evolutionary or sociological force had wrought these physical changes upon one-time fair and lovely womankind? And—where were the men of this day?

AS IF in answer to his unvoiced query, was presented the next act of this weird tableau. The circle of obese matrons parted, disgorging from their midst one whom, in the wan light, Steve had not noticed before. A tiny, withered parody of a man with painted lips and cheeks, *kohl*-blackened lashes, elaborately ringletted hair tumbling shoulder-deep to a white samite frock.

As this futile creature was loosed, terror glittered in his heady eyes; he emitted a small, high-pitched bleat and strove to break from his guards. But the warrior women, grim and adamant as stone, formed a phalanx about him, a harricade of hard flesh which stood unyielding before the panic thrusts of his soft, white fists.

Then it was the dust-gold maiden turned to the young neophyte, accepted from her an object which gleamed evilly in the sallow light; then it was the voices of the loose-fleshed matrons

rose in mournful keening; then it was that two of the apron-girt women stepped forward to seize the struggling male in oaken grip, tearing the samite frock from his body, baring his soft, hairless chest to the knife.

And then it was that Steve Duane horribly understood the meaning of this ritual. Chuck Lafferty got it, too. His voice exploded in Steve's ear.

"Hell's flaming fire, Steve, they're sacrificing the little guy—to us!"

BUT Duane had already recognized the finale to which the drama was moving, and was already in motion. He raced to the transparent barrier.

"Stop!" he cried. "Stop—!"

There was no way of knowing whether or not his words were audible to those outside. True, the glass dome of their prison was cracked, but even so the curved surface might mute all sounds. But communication is not a matter of sound-waves alone; action has a tongue. Steve lifted his arm—as he had seen the golden priestess raise hers a moment before—in the universal symbol for cessation.

His gesture saved the doomed man's life. The raised blade stayed . . . then clattered to the floor from the dust-gold maiden's nerveless fingers. Heads turned, and faces hard and soft adopted one expression of awed terror. Voices rose in a bedlam of confusion; then, as one, the women tumbled to their knees!

Cringing, they cowered there prostrate. But one had the courage to raise her eyes again: the leader. On her brow was a furrow of perplexity as if she were trying to recollect some once-heard, half-forgotten instruction. Then her visage lighted; her voice lifted in clarion call.

"Jain! The Slumberers have awakened—at last! The Day of Freedom

dawns! To the Sacred Wheel, swiftly!"

A flame of joy burst in the eyes of one of the grim-faced warrior women; her lean flanks tensed as, leaping to her feet, she hurried across the chamber to a huge, metal wheel on the farther wall. Sweat sprang from her forehead, her sinews knotted in cords as she tugged at this device. It held fast. Again she wrenched its spokes, white lines of strain upon her jaw. This time red flakes of rust showered to the floor, the wheel groaned protest at being thus rudely roused from an age of disuse—and slowly turned!

As it did so, Steve was conscious of a draft of cool air about his ankles, his knees, his thighs. Looking sharply he saw that the nether rim of the glass prison was separating from the edge of the dais; the whole structure hoisted upward like the gigantic bell it was.

Slowly as it had started, the movement stopped. And Steve and Chuck—along with the wide-eyed von Rath, whom the fresh air had revived, and who had now lurched to his feet—stood face to face with their worshippers!

Now the leader dropped to one knee; in a voice which even determination could not steady quavered:

"Hail, O Slumberers! Aie, look with mercy upon us, Thy children, for lo! we have tarried and kept the faith, even as was ordained!"

Chuck stared at the speaker.

"Hey, what makes here? A revival meeting? How come this 'faith and ordained' chatter?"

The German was equally taken aback. So much so that for the moment he quite forgot the neo-paganistic pretensions of his creed, and relapsed into the speech-habits of one-time Christian Germany.

"*Gott im Himmel!*" he exclaimed. "*Vas—?*"

ONLY Steve Duane had the acuteness to comprehend the lofty place to which he and his companions had been elevated, and the quickness of mind to take advantage of it. Aside, he whispered hurriedly, "Don't you get it? We are their gods—or the symbols of their gods! Quiet, now!" And to the girl, in a gravely commanding voice:

"Rise, O Priestess!" he said. "The Slumberers hear, and are merciful. Is there one in command here?"

The priestess rose with slowly returning assurance.

"Not *here*, O Wise One; but elsewhere in Fautnox sits the Mother in everlasting wisdom."

*The Mother*, thought Steve swiftly. *Then his surmise as to the sociological organization of this race had not been wrong. It was a matriarchy, divided into groups of warriors, workers, and — what else could the flabby-fleshed ones be but breeders? That accounted for the sole male being a pampered, bedizened pet.*

*But—"Fautnox"? Doubt clouded his eyes; he bit his lip. Then his trusted ally, hunch, came to his rescue. Why, of course! A concrete, subterranean chamber of massive size. A wild wealth of gold used lavishly, almost negligently, by a civilization obviously semi-barbaric. A language which owned English as its parent, but was changed by untold ages of misuse and elision. Fautnox was—Fort Knox, Kentucky!\**

The next words of the priestess brought verification of his guess. Humbly she said, yet proudly, too:

"Come, O Slumberers! Let Thy handmaiden, Beth, lead Thee to the

\* Fort Knox, Kentucky in addition to being an army post is, in 1942, a bastioned repository wherein is stored seventy-five percent of the entire world's gold—Ed.

Mother of the Tucki Clan."

She made a sign of obeisance, whirled, issued orders to those who followed her. Instantly the kneeling ones rose. The warriors formed an avenue before the dais; metal *clanged!* on metal as a score of bright blades whipped from scabbards.

Chuck Lafferty started. "Now, wait a minute, Steve! I don't like them swords, *nokow!* You sure this Mardi Gras is on the level?"

"Positive!" asserted Duane. "Keep your tongue still and follow me. The Marines have landed, and the situation is well in hand. You, von Rath—come along! And don't forget, I don't need much of an excuse to slug you. So watch out!"

Thus marched the trio of "Slumberers," surrounded by a triumphant band, upward from the cavern through the strong, bastioned corridors of a citadel which had once served as the repository for a mighty nation's riches, to meet the Mother.

In one expectation, Steve Duane was disappointed.

He considered it a foregone conclusion their journey would take them to the surface, into sunshine or moonlight as the case might be. But though they rose several levels, they never left the subterranean depths. News of their awakening, spreading swiftly and mysteriously as only tidings of evil or great joy can spread, had somehow gone before them; clansfolk poured from everywhere to crowd the passageways through which they traveled.

**I**N VAIN were drawn the warriors' swords, futile were the commands of the soldier-captain, Jain. The crowd pressed forward, screaming wild paeans of joy, to look upon, to touch the garments of their demigods. Had there been a rigid caste system in this

community, it was forgotten now. Laborers and breeders stood shoulder to shoulder, weeping openly with joy. Here a towering warrior lifted a spindling male that he might see, above the heads of the throng, the Deliverers. There an awed worker stood with gaping mouth in the midst of a bevy of shrill-piping breeders, a dirty blot against their immaculate whiteness.

It was with relief, and barely with whole skins, that the small procession wound its way finally through a guarded door into the sanctuary of the Mother's *loom*.

There was nothing pretentious about the chamber. It was just another room, barren as any they had passed through, simply furnished with the scant necessities of life. But two things served to differentiate it from other dwelling-places: the tremendous heap of parchment rolls overflowing from loose racks in one corner—and the woman who rose to greet them as they entered.

For her, Steve Duane could conceive no other feeling than one of instant affection. A ruler she was, a tyrant she might be, but there was goodness, honor and truth in the gaze she bent upon them, gentleness in her voice as she spoke.

"Then it is true!" she breathed. "You *have* awakened, and after all these long and weary years, I have lived to see the ancient prophecies fulfilled. Now am I, Mother Maatha of the Tucki Clan, content to die. For at last you have come to free us, as was promised—"

Her white head bent, her soft eyes filled with tears of happiness, and she stretched forth a lean, tremulous hand. Steve moved forward, took it between his own.

"Yes, Mother," he said gently, "we have come. But I do not understand.

You speak of freedom as if it were a lost thing. Who holds you captive? Not—" A sudden fear struck him—"not the Nazis?"

The old woman shook her head.

"The word you use is strange to me, O Wise One. But surely, you, who are All-Wise and Eternal, know that all Earth lies crushed beneath the heel of the vandals from Daan?"

### CHAPTER III

#### Attack

"DAAN?" repeated Steve wonderingly. "Daan, Mother?"

"Yes, O Everlasting. Daan, the shining star of morn and eventide. Surely you know how, many snows ago, before my mother's mother's mother learned the Rites, the invaders from Daan swooped down upon Earth in their rockets, destroying all who stood before them? How they seized Earth's mighty cities and vanquished equally both the Women and the Wild Ones?"

Surprisingly, it was von Rath who spoke. To Steve's astonishment, the German seemed to have forgotten, faced with this new problem, their own ideological differences. He said incredulously, "*Leutnant*, the star of *morgen und abend!* That is—"

"I know," said Steve. "The planet Venus! They call it 'Daan'; why, I do not know. Perhaps from our word 'dawn.' But I'm beginning to understand their distortion of America's national anthem. I wondered why she chanted of the '*Daan's surly light*—' and the '*rockets' red glare-bombs*—"

"But—" And he turned to the Mother querulously—"how can we help you? We are hut three, and you are many."

"It is written," said the Mother Maatha confidently, "that one day the

Slumberers shall waken, and that with their wakening the one known as Dwain shall reveal the Great Secret which he alone knows. It is also written that this knowledge will forevermore bring peace to Earth. You, O Slumberer, are Dwain?"

"I am Duane. But I know of no secret—"

"Wait a minute, Steve!" That was Lafferty. "You're forgetting something, ain't you? You *do* know a secret!"

"What?"

"*Methioprane!* Don't you get it? We went beddy-bye, Lord knows how long ago. Nobody else knew nothing about that gas we was working on. All they knew was that when they come in and found the three of us laid out colder than herring, we had evidently sniffed it. The medicos examined us, and found out we was still alive, only in a state of coma, or suspended animation, or whatever you call it. So—"

"You're right, Chuck! You must be right! They must have moved us here to Fort Knox, left a message to succeeding generations that our glass tomb was to be kept inviolate till one day we should waken. But—how long? Mother, surely *you* must know? How long have we slept?"

The Mother nodded sagely.

"Yes, O Dwain, I know. When they advised me of your wakening, I performed the magic of Numbers. Your sleep began in the year One-Nine-and-Four-Two. It is now the year Three-Four-and-Eight-Eight—"

"The Thirty-Fifth Century!" cried Steve. "Chuck, we have slept for more than *fifteen hundred years!*"

But if he had expected Chuck Lafferty to be dismayed by this revelation, he had another think coming.

Chuck just grunted. "That," he said, "ain't hard to believe. I been wonder-

ing why I'm so confounded hungry. Now I know. It's been a heluva long time since breakfast, pal!"

The Mother, Maatha, stirred anxiously at his words.

"But I neglect my duty!" she exclaimed. "Beth, send for food. The gods are an-hungered."

"As you say, O Mother." The priestess slipped away. Soon she reappeared, followed by workers bearing golden trays laden with food and drink. These they placed before the trio without lifting their eyes, then backed from the room. Steve looked after them curiously.

"But, Mother Maatha, you must tell your clansfolk we are not gods. We are but men—"

"Men!" The Priestess Beth almost dropped the golden ewer from which she was pouring water. "Men!"

THE Mother said hastily—too hastily, thought Steve Duane—and in a tone of admonition, "Be not so swift of ear, child, when is spoken that of which you know naught. The god but jests, nor is it ours to comment on his words.

"O, Wise One—" She changed the subject quickly—"Is it not true, then, that you *do* hear us the knowledge of a Great Secret? A new weapon with which we may wreak vengeance on our enemies?"

Steve answered slowly, "It is true, O Mother, that I hold such a secret. But—" He was thinking of the chemical problem involved in the preparation of his invention, the anesthetic *methioprane*. Not only did the preparatory process for its sublimation require intricate equipment unknown to this crude culture; it also demanded an ingredient which even in Steve's day had been so frightfully rare that it had taken ten months to segregate the flask-

full used in his experiments.

The basic ingredient of *methioprane* was the seed-pod of the swamp-musk, a tank-epiphyte so delicate, so sensitive, that even in Steve's day—fifteen hundred years ago—it had been virtually extinct. Only the painstaking plant husbandry of a hundred patriotic botanists had enabled Steve to continue his work. It had been hoped that once his research was done, and crowned with success, the end-product of his labors might be analyzed, and its formula synthesized from ingredients less rare.

And in a day which had known nylon, alnico, plastics; had made felt hats of cows' milk, automobile bodies of rolled oats, and women's hose of water, coal and air, this might have been possible. But now—

"Tell me first, O Mother," said Steve, "something of these Daan invaders. It is needful to know their nature if I am to prepare a weapon against them. When came their rockets to Earth? How strong is their rulership over our world? And was it they who destroyed all the males and left the women to fend for themselves?"

"But, Wise One!" exclaimed the priestess Beth, "None ever caused the Women to 'fend for themselves!' We Women are the rulers of humankind, and ever have been. Surely you know that—or do you jest again?"

And once more the Mother interrupted hurriedly, with an all-too-obvious desire to change the subject.

"A hundred seasons have come and gone, O Dwain," she said, "since first the Daan fleet landed on this planet. But we shall talk of this in more detail later. There is a query I would put to you."

"It is told in the records of the Ancient Ones that of the Slumberers two were good and one was evil. It is told



that when the Slumberers waken, the evil one must die. Which is he who must face judgment?"

"WELL!" said Chuck Lafferty. "Now we're starting to get somewhere! Them records is okay, huh, Steve? All right, von *Rat*—here it comes! Fifteen hundred years late, but you know the old saying."

The German's face was a white mask of fear. Well it might be, for at the Mother's query, the ranks of the warrior women had snapped together; now they were standing with drawn swords ready for any command. At that moment, a nod of Steve Duane's head, a word from his lips, would have cost the enemy agent his life.

But no such word was forthcoming. Instead, his brow drawn thoughtfully, Steve turned and spoke to the Nazi in his native tongue.

"You hear that, von Rath? You understand?"

"Ja, mein *Leutnant*! But—but you must not let them do this thing! It is barbarous . . . uncivilized . . ."

"No more so," pointed out Duane grimly, "than taking young women and girls from their homes and sending them to the front for the amusement of fighting troops, or shooting fifty hostages for every one of your own soldiers slain. But that's neither here nor there. The point is, we used to be enemies, but that period of mankind's history is dead and gone, hurried beneath fifteen centuries of dust.

"We are now three exiles of Time, the only remaining representatives of a civilization now vanished. We can never return to our own warring world. The very differences which made us foes have been obliterated by the ages and, from what the Mother says, I suspect by an even greater peril to human-kind.

"Now, what do you say? Will you join us? Lay aside the old enmity and hatred? Or—shall I tell which Slumberer was the 'evil one?'"

Von Rath said, "There is but one possible answer, *mein Kamerad*. You are right: it is futile to continue our ancient warfare in this strange new world. I am your ally."

The women were listening, wide-eyed, to this "speech of the gods." Chuck Lafferty, who knew no more of the German tongue than they, was also listening suspiciously. He glared discontent as his superior offered von Rath his hand, growled as the erstwhile Nazi met it hesitantly.

"Hey, what's the big idea, Steve? You turning Fifth Columnist on me? Turn that heel over to the dames!"

"No, Chuck. Whatever his faults, despite our former differences, von Rath is an intelligent man. We must respect him as such, and accept his help in solving our new problems. Therefore—" He turned to the Mother—"There has been some mistake, O Mother. The records are wrong. There was no evil one amongst the Slumberers. We are three brothers pledged as one to aid you."

The Mother said humbly, "So be it, O Dwain. Shall I then dismiss the warriors?"

"Do so."

THE Mother motioned to Beth. The priestess murmured a command to the warrior chieftain, Jain, and reluctantly but obediently the strait-harnessed ones wheeled and marched from the room. The Mother turned again to Steve.

"And now, O Wise One—?"

"First," suggested Steve, "let us learn those things which have happened since we slept. In the year out of which we came a great war was rag-

ing. The forces of peace defended themselves against hordes of international anarchy. What was the result? How ended this conflict, and did men—?"

"Forgive me, O Dwain!" Again, at the sound of that *tabu* word, the Mother interrupted hastily, casting a worried, sidelong glance at the priestess Beth. "Perhaps it were best we should discuss these holy matters privately. Such secrets are not fit for maiden ears. The priestess is unenlightened; she has not yet embarked upon the sacred Pilgrimage."

"Pilgrimage?" repeated Steve wonderingly.

"Yes, O Everlasting. She has not yet visited 'Kota, the Place of the Gods. She does not know—"

"But, Mother!" pleaded the dust-gold maiden, "Soon I *shall* go, and will then be initiate to these mysteries. May I not stay now and garner wisdom from the lips of the Ancient Ones? By Taamuz and Ihrim I swear—yes, even by far-seeing Tedhi—no word I hear shall escape my lips!"

The Mother shook her head, her lips pressed together firmly.

"It is forbidden, my daughter. Only after you have seen with your own eyes the Place of the Gods and learned its dread secret can you join this consultation. Such knowledge, coming suddenly, might destroy your very sanity. Go, now, to your *koam* and recite thrice the magic of fives—"

Steve, wisely, held his counsel, nor tried to interfere in matters of ritual which he did not understand. Chuck Lafferty was less inhibited. He said:

"Hell's imps, let the kid stick around if she wants! We'll keep it clean. What's this all about, anyway? I don't get it. Where's this 'Place of the Gods,' and who are Taamuz and Teddy and—?"

"*Teddy!*" The name leaped from Steve Duane's tongue. He, too, had been vainly trying to decipher the girl's words. Lafferty's altered pronunciation gave him the clue he needed. "Teddy . . . Thomas . . . Abraham! Mother—this 'Place of the Gods' of which you speak! Is it in Dakota? South Dakota?"

The Mother Maatha answered perplexedly, "Verily, the Place of the Gods *is* in 'Kota, O Eternal One. But it lies to the *north* of here, not south. Across the plains of Zurri and 'Braska territories, beyond the Big Water—"

"I thought so!" shouted Steve. "I knew I was right! Chuck, this is terrific! You wouldn't believe—"

"Believe *what?*" demanded Lafferty. "Thunderation, I don't even understand! Give out! What's it all about?"

"Why, don't you see? The 'gods' these women worship are—"

But not at that moment was Chuck to be let in on his discovery. For there came another interruption, this time in the shape of a warrior messenger.

"They come, O Mother! They come again!"

Alarm dawned swiftly in the old woman's eyes. In an instant she was on her feet.

"Who comes, my daughter? Not the—the Daans?"

"Nay, Mother, none so dangerous as they, thank Jarg! But a foe dangerous enough. It is the animals of the forests who storm our citadel with wicked force and fury. The filthy male creatures of the outland, O Mother. The Wild Ones!"

## CHAPTER IV

### Revelation

CHUCK LAFFERTY yelled, "Oh, boy! Fun!" and started from the

room. Steve halted him with a word. "Chuck! Where do you think *you're* going?"

"Why—why, I dunno. Topside, I suppose. There's a scrap going on somewhere around here, ain't they?"

"A fight," said Steve. "But not *our* fight. I don't exactly understand—" To the Mother he said—"Just who *are* these 'Wild Ones,' O Mother? Fierce beasts?"

"Beasts, yes, O Dwain," replied the matriarch. "But of the two-legged variety. They are the foul males who some say are a brutish branch of our own human race—though it is bard to credit that theory. Matted, hairy creatures dwelling in the jungleslands of Tizathy. They have no females of their own, as we have drone-men to impregnate our breeding-mothers, so when need and nature tightens their loins, they make raids upon our encampments to capture Women, that they may replenish their race."

The priestess Beth was standing before Steve, eagerness brightening the steel-blue of her eyes.

"It was for this, O Dwain," she cried, "you awakened! To rid us once and evermore of these who prey upon us. Come! Come with me and see how brave Women vanquish their foes!"

Steve glanced at von Rath. The German nodded.

"It were well to learn what sort of enemies we shall meet in this time, *Leutnant* Duane."

"Right!" agreed Steve. "Very well, priestess. Lead the way."

The way carried them again upward from the bowels of Fautnox, debouching at last into a walled enclosure which, at some dim period of the past, may have been a courtyard. Ages had taken their toll, however, of the once-sturdy barricades. Their firm-

ness had been breeched in a dozen spots; gray piles of stone and detritus were strewn beneath wide openings which a barbarian clan with no knowledge of cement had found no way of mending.

It was before these entrances the battle raged most fiercely. Within the court, no breeders or pet males were to be seen; apparently they had all been removed to safer spots. The workers and the warriors defended the citadel. Of these, the warriors did the actual fighting; the workers acted as an auxiliary corps, bearing fresh supplies of lances, arrows and bows to the fighting-women when their stores were depleted or broken, rallying the Amazons to weakened salients when danger loomed, dragging the wounded from the field of conflict.

This much saw Duane at a glance. Then his eye swung to the attackers, and his body stiffened.

In some respects, Beth had told the truth. The Wild Ones *were* dirty, hairy, unkempt. Their garments and weapons *were* crude as compared with the golden equipage of the Women. But there ended their brutishness, their loutishness. Though they fought savagely, it was clear to the most unmilitary eye that their main effort was not toward wholesale slaughter and destruction—but to capture!

When a Wild One fell, perhaps suffering from only a minor wound, all feminine adversaries within sword-thrust were upon him in an instant, his body was literally hacked to bits before it was abandoned. But when a Woman fell—then it was a different story! Attackers surged forward *en masse*, with a sort of savage desperation, recklessly braving death in order to take, unharmed, their prisoner!

And incredible as it might seem—those who bore the captured warriors

clawing and screaming from the fray, did so with an almost hallowed tenderness!

**B**UT this was the tide of battle only as seen through unprejudiced eyes. At Steve's shoulder, the priestess Beth's golden body was tense with rage and hatred, her hands gripped his arm hotly.

"You see, O Dwain? Behold how the vandals lay waste the flower of our womanhood; Vengeance, Eternal One! Cast a spell upon them; yea, call down the fury of the Ancients upon those who would despoil our—"

Steve turned to Chuck.

"Well, chum? You still itching to get in the war?"

Lafferty's eyes were mirrors of surprise.

"Who—me?" he gasped. "Hell's imps, no! Why, them guys ain't wild animals at all. They're not matinee idols, I grant you, but they're no worse than—well, than a couple of hundred pro wrestlers from our own time. Steve, they're men! Like—"

Steve said, "What do you say, von Rath?"

"I am confused," admitted the German, "but I believe your friend is right. These are barbarians, but nevertheless true members of the genus *Homo sapiens*. This battle is stark madness! *Gross Gott!* Women against men—"

The priestess had drawn away, was staring at them as one aghast.

"In the Name of Jarg," she whispered awefully, "what blasphemy is this? Men! You compare these hideous creatures with our sacred charges? Am I mad?"

"Not mad, honey," grinned Steve suddenly, "just sort of befuddled. You and the rest of your gang. And it's about time you snapped out of it. I

think I can turn the trick. I don't think those 'Wild Ones' ever got around to studying the Greek wars, so it ought to work.

"Can you issue commands to your warriors? I thought so. All right, then. Tell the fighting women to withdraw to the protection of the walls, out of sight, and the workers to retreat toward this building."

"What! You bid me—*Here!*" The priestess Beth drew from her girdle a long, slim, golden knife, banded it to him. With a sob she clenched her fists upon her cupped breasts.

Steve stared at her in astonishment.

"What the—?"

"Strike!" she begged from between white lips. "Strike hard and true, O Slumberer. For I must defy even you, a god. What you bid me do is treason, and rather death than I should betray my Clan!"

Von Rath's eyes were admiring. He said raptly, "But what *eine frau!*" Duane was less impressed with her histrionics. He said, "Oh, nuts!" and tossed the dagger back to her. "Look, sister," he said wearily, "skip the mellerdrama. You want to win this fracas, don't you?"

"But—but, yes, O Wise One—"

"Okay, then. Do what I say. This isn't a sell-out; it's what we gods call the 'Trojan horse' trick. Magic, see? The good old ousemay-aptray."

The priestess seized on the one word she understood. "Magic! *Aie*, Thy forgiveness, O Eternal One. I leap to obey Thy commands."

"Well, get going—" commented Steve gloomily—"before there aren't any Wild Ones left to capture. Well?"

**CHUCK** scratched his head as the priestess ran to the warrior captain, Jain, and transmitted Steve's orders.

"I don't get it," he complained. "I don't get it at all. Whose side are you playing on, anyway?"

"I'm tired explaining," said Steve. "Wait and see!"

He hadn't long to wait. The scheme of wily Odysseus worked as well in the Thirty-fifth Century as in pre-historic Troy.\* Better, perhaps. The Trojans had their Cassandra; the Wild Ones had no soothsayer to warn them against a ruse. Men who had never won a battle against their better-armed adversaries leaped eagerly through the breeches abandoned by the retreating women.

In a solid swarm they flooded half-way across the open courtyard, leaving flanks and rear exposed. And then:

"Warriors!" cried Steve. "Close the openings behind them! Your foes are trapped!"

And it was so! The Wild Ones were caught in a vise; their thin ranks were hopelessly sandwiched between divisions of warriors and workers. The very portals they had fought so hard to win were now closed avenues to freedom.

As they stared wildly about them, muttering, milling in aimless circles, preparing to sell their lives dearly, the golden voice of Beth rang out over the court.

"Upon them, Women of Tuck! Destroy the invaders. . . strike and kill till the last lies drowned in his

blood! The gods have blessed us with victory! Kill! Kill—"

"Whew!" said Lafferty. "Gentle wench, ain't she?"

But Steve had no time to bandy words. In an instant golden lances, arrows of barbed death would fill the air, and his plan would end in a massacre. He shouted again, drowning out the maiden's lesser voice.

"Nay, hold! Stay your wrath! Hear our command: Let not another drop of blood be shed! These 'Wild Ones' are not beasts or fiends, but humans like yourselves! *Men*—and your rightful mates!"

THE silence which greeted his words was sudden and devastatingly complete. Steve seized that moment to whisper to his companions, "Come on! Let's get down there before the dam busts!" and swiftly the three moved toward the center of the courtyard.

Then the moment was shattered by a howling simoon of sound. The hoarse gasps of the workers merged with strident cries of wonder ripped from the throats of the warriors; with these mingled a grateful roar of acclamation from the trapped males.

But—overwhelming tribute to the awe in which these Women held their gods—not a spear was cast, not a bow bent. All held their positions save one: the priestess Beth. Dust-gold flame in motion, she burst her way through the throng to confront Steve with blazing fury.

"Wherefore, O Dwain, this untoward mercy? Can it be you do not know the Law? It is written that all Wild Ones be slain, nor their mildest stripping spared!"

There was only one language this beautiful, but barbaric, creature could understand. Steve employed it. With a shrug he cast her hand from his arm

\*The original "Trojan Horse" was a huge, hollow effigy of a horse, built at the command of Odysseus (Ulysses), and left outside the gates of seven-years-besieged Troy by the apparently retreating Greeks. The exuberant Trojans, unable to wheed this gigantic testimonial to their victory through the gates of their city, broke down a portion of the walls, though warned by the "mad prophetess", Cassandra, that this was a trick. That night a Greek "Fifth Column" crept from within the Trojan Horse and opened all gates of Troy to the returning Greek armies, who laid waste the city.—Ed.

as if its touch defiled him; in a voice of thunder he said:

"Woman, you question *me*? I am the Law!"

Then, having tossed in his raise, he held his breath. If she called his cards—

But the bluff worked. Color fled from the priestess' lips; she stared at him strangely for a moment, then sank to one knee. In a low voice:

"Yes, O Eternal One!" she whispered. "Thou art the Law!"

"Then listen," bade Steve, "and learn, O priestess!" And he turned to the awestruck captives. "Which of you calls himself leader of this band?"

One stepped forward hesitantly. He was covered with sweat and blood, grimy, bearded, but his features were fine, his eyes those of a reasoning creature.

"I am the leader, O Mighty One."

"You call yourself—?"

"Jon, O Heaven-sent."

"Tell me, then, Jon, and tell this Woman. Are you a man, or are you not?"

A subtle straightening lifted the Wild One's breast, his chin, his eyes. He said firmly:

"I am a Man!"

"But—" protested Beth.

"Shut up, sister!" snapped Steve.

"Jon—why do you make war upon the Women?"

"We do not make war upon them, O Firm-of-Hand. Only when our need of mates becomes acute do we seek to liberate new mothers for our children that our seed may live on."

"Blasphemy!" screamed the priestess. "I will listen no more! He is no Man. Men are weakling creatures who serve only to enripen our breeding-mothers. This beast—"

"Quiet!" ordered Steve. "Jon, why have you not *told* these Women you are Men?"

The bearded one shrugged. "It has been tried, Great Chieftain. Many times has it been tried in ages past, but no Woman will listen. They hunt us with packs, they dig pits to trap us and line the pits with sharp sticks, they do not heed our cries for truce and understanding—"

"It is forbidden," defended Beth haughtily, "that a Woman should hear a Wild One's speech. He is no Man—"

Steve's patience snapped.

"He *is* a man, O priestess—even as I am a Man, and my comrades also!"

THE priestess Beth fell back a pace, her eyes glazed with something akin to horror. "Thou art . . . a . . . Man?"

"Not only I," Steve told her, "but the very gods you worship, O puzzled one. You cannot believe? Then come!" He spoke gently. "Come with me to the Mother, Beth. You cannot doubt her. She will tell you I speak the truth. You, Jon—come with us!"

Eager to settle this matter once and for all, he led the way back into the citadel, down the corridors to the *hoam* of the Mother. Under stern command to maintain a truce they left the warrior band and the knot of captive Wild Ones. Jon followed hopefully, the priestess like one stricken. At last they reached the room wherein waited the matriarch. She rose and hobbled forward to greet them.

"The battle is done, O Wise Ones? You have destroyed our foes? Aye, I see it is so. But—but you bring one with you? Why is this?"

The priestess broke her silence, bursting forward to kneel trembling before the old woman.

\* *Liber*: to kidnap. "From 'Lindbergh'?"—Ed.

"Mother, doom is upon us! The legends erred. These are no Deliverers who have risen from the tomb to aid us, but mocking demons! He, the one called Dwain, has confessed that he is no god, but a *Man*! And with horrid blasphemy—forgive me, O Mother!—he said that, yea, even our gods were Men!"

The eyes of the Mother clouded, her lips moved in an unintelligible phrase that might have been a prayer. And she stared at Duane beseechingly.

"O Slumberer," she said, "you—you have told? Then the time for the Revelation has come?"

"It has come," said Steve quietly. "Speak, Mother."

The Mother laid a trembling hand on Beth's dust-gold hair. And:

"Then hear, O my daughter," she said, "and learn the Great Secret which until now no common Woman has been allowed to suspect, which no priestess has ever known until after she has made the sacred pilgrimage to the Place of the Gods."

"The Gods—great Jarg and solemn Taamuz, lean Ibrim and far-seeing Tedhi—are not Women like ourselves. Deep in the shadowed grottoes of far 'Kota I have looked upon them; I have seen their faces strong and fine, covered with the crisp Man-hair. The Gods of the Ancients, O Beth—are Men!"

Chuck glanced at Duane curiously.

"She's *seen* the gods, Steve?"

Steve nodded. "So have we, Chuck—in the modeling. I'm not surprised these women worshipped their statues. They must be impressive to a civilization so backward as this. In the Black Hills . . . the side of a mountain carven in a gigantic work of art . . . don't you remember? George . . . Thomas . . . Teddy . . . Abraham . . ."

"Mount Rushmore!" gasped Chuck. "That is the 'Place of the Gods'!"

"Exactly!"

"But—but how—?"

"Listen," suggested Steve. "I think we can learn much from the Mother's words."

For the Mother had closed her eyes. In a recitative monotone she was intoning a message to the dazed priestess at her feet.

"**T**HUS say the holy records: *'And in those days were Men the Masters of humankind, and Men were truly in the image of the gods. And mighty were the works of men; over highways of creet and steel they raced swift chariots which took their sustenance from vaped liquid; they spoke to each other from afar over wires that hummed and goblets that glowed; in those days none wanted for food, they spent their days in laughter, their nights in gaming and magic.'*

*'But it came to pass that some Men, zealous to rule all others, made war upon their brothers. Great and terrible were the weapons of their destruction: great catapults, which hurled fire and flame and exploding death; snarling hand-bows which shot steel arrowheads; with gases they wreaked woe, and with waters that burn the flesh.'*

*'On earth and sea they made these battles, and even in the air. For in those days, the Ancient Ones were winged, like the birds. They soared high, making great thunders, and when they warred they dropped huge eggs of death.'*

*'For many years this battle waged, and, lo! neither side could gain a victory. In those days, it was the Men who fought while the Women kept the hoams. So the Men fought and died till their number was as the sands of the sea. Until at last there came a day when the Women despaired and*

cried out, "Alas! Alas!"

"Then joined the Women in conclave; great was their sadness. And they vowed to rid themselves forever of war and of the brutal Men. They stopped sending fire-eggs to the Men who battled on Earth's five seas; they built walled forts and hid themselves therein.

"Then the Men cried, 'Give us weapons!' and behold! there were no more weapons, and the men cried, 'Give us food, lest we perish of hunger!' and lo! the Earth was parched. So the Men came back to their hoams, seeking their Women.

"Then the Women would not receive them, and now was bitter warfare again between Men and Women. But the Women in their walled cities vanquished the brutal males, and they did flee to the hills and jungles.

"Thus it was in the old days. . . ."

## CHAPTER V

### Captured

THE matriarch's voice dwindled into silence. For an awkward moment none spoke. Then said Jon, leader of the Wild Ones, "Great are the records of thy Clan, O Mother. Often I have pondered on these matters, nor solved them not. We have no legends like these; only one that before the Daans came to Earth, we Men were the lords of humankind."

The priestess Beth was forged of stronger stuff than Steve Duane had believed or dared hope. The knowledge thrust upon her must have come as a staggering shock, but she met it unflinching.

"But, Mother Maatha," was her only demurrer, "if the Ancient Ones and the gods were Men, then what are those which we call men? And—what

means this Revelation to our mode of living?"

"Our men," replied the Mother, "are the inbred males born to our breeding-mothers. They are not true Men; this is a truth known to Clan Mothers for many generations. But what could we do? How else perpetuate our Clan? It was forbidden that Women should have contact with the Wild Ones. And it is certain that these—" She stared at Jon with evident repugnance—"are not cast in the mould of the gods we worship."

Steve stepped forward, placed a hand on the shoulder of the hesitant Jon.

"Judge not a man by his garments, O Mother of Women, nor by your own high standards. Bathe this creature, cleanse the blood from his wounds, anoint him with sweet-scented oil, shave the hair from his lips and chin, and beneath his layers of grime you will find one wrought in the image of the gods.

"You have asked, priestess Beth, what the Revelation means to your mode of living? I will tell you. No more must Women war on Men, nor Men attack and seek to liber Woman. A new era is proclaimed by us, the Slumberers. Henceforth must Wild Ones and Women join in common amity and purpose!"

"Join in—!"

"Even more," continued Steve boldly, "there shall no longer be castes of Women. No longer must Women be forced to adopt the professions of warrior, worker or breeder, but each shall have the privilege of being wooed and won by a Man, her mate!"

A new radiance shone in the eyes of the Mother. She whispered, "Now are the prophecies fulfilled, indeed. A mate for each Woman! Now is the empty loneliness of sterile wombs banished forever—"



"But how," demanded Beth shrewdly, "is this 'wooing' done? Must we first subdue the Men, and then—?"

"Each shall choose the one she wants," Steve advised her, "then win him as she can. Thus, also, it was in the old days."

Beth looked at Jon and wrinkled her nose. She gazed through a portal of the Mother's *hoam* and studied a spindling pet male peering inquisitively in at the meeting, and sniffed contemptuously. She frowned.

She said, "And you—O Dwain? Did you not claim to be a Man?"

"That is right."

"Very well, then," said the priestess. "I will make my choice of mates now. I choose you!"

"N-NOW, wait a minute—" began Steve.

"Shall I come to your *hoam* to-night?" asked the dust-gold maid with alarming ingenuousness, "Or will you attend me in mine? I do not understand these matters so well, O Dwain. But one of the breeding-mothers can teach me the Rites—"

Lafferty stole a sidelong glance at Steve's suddenly flaming cheeks, and chuckled, "Okay, buster. Let's hear you talk your way out of this one!" Steve coughed nervously and changed the subject.

"You—er—you must not be so hasty, priestess," he said. "There are other—er—more important matters. About the Daans, for instance. Though we gain unity ourselves, yet we are a conquered people. Before we can rebuild humankind's lost civilization, we must first hurl the invader from Earth. To do this, we need force."

"Jon—can you communicate with other tribes of Wild Ones? Call them hither for a general conclave?"

The bearded outlander nodded

thoughtfully. "Yes. I think so. It will not be easy. Our tribes are scattered and farflung, nor is there great unity amongst us, but—yes. It can be done. It will take many days and nights, though."

"How about you, Mother Maatha? Can you summon Women of other Clans to a grand council at Fautnox?"

"I can, O Wise One. The Mother Mairlee of Lextun is my sworn sister; we made the Pilgrimage together. The Tensee Clans owe us a debt of honor since we aided them in defending their mountain stronghold, Ashful, against an attacking horde of Wild Ones as many snows ago as I have fingers. These will surely come at my call, as will the Clina and Yana Clans, and I will bid them bring all others they can persuade. But this will take time, O Dwain. The way is long and the roads bad."

Von Rath coughed gently.

"If I might make a suggestion, *Leutnant*—?"

"Yes?"

"Since we plot to overthrow *ein herrenvolk*, would it not be well to learn more about those whom we plan to attack? These Daans are a mystery to us—"

"Absolutely right!" agreed Steve. "And that's how I had planned to spend the weeks that must intervene before our forces can be drawn together. Mother, where lies the nearest Daan encampment?"

"To the north of Fautnox," said the Mother promptly, "two days walking. In a city of the Ancients called Sinatty, where once dwelt a mighty Clan known as the Reds."

"Reds!" exclaimed von Rath. "You hear, Duane? Then our *Fuehrer* was right in warning the world against the menace of Bolshevik Russia! Small wonder man's civilization toppled, if

even your nation succumbed to—"

Chuck Lafferty made a rude noise with his lips.

"Guess again, 'kraut," he chuckled. "These Reds was different. They did their scrapping with bats and baseballs, and their boss was a 'Dictator' named McKechnie. Cincinnati, eh? Boy, many's the time I've parked my tootsies in a hed in the Netherland Plaza.\* Steve, remember the night we—"

But his words had struck a responsive chord. A gasp escaped the Mother Maatha.

"Nedlunplaza! Yes, that is it! That is the name of the Daans' fortress in Sinatty!"

Steve Duane grunted satisfaction.

"In that case," he said, "call the room-clerk and make reservations. We're on our way to Cincy!"

**T**WO days later, they were not merely on their way to the one-time Queen City of the Ohio but almost there.

There were eight in their party. Duane and Lafferty and von Rath—whom, despite their pledge of mutual aid, Steve preferred to keep under surveillance—headed the group. The warrior captain, Jain, commanded a trio of fighting-women who had been assigned to guide and guard them on their adventure. Eighth member of the expedition was the priestess Beth. Over Steve's protest she had insisted on coming.

"It is my right," she declared, "as a priestess. If I go not, the journey is without favor in the sight of Jarg."

"But—" argued Steve.

"Moreover," insisted the girl, "one must go to serve as interpreter and

counsel. You Slumberers know not the ways of those through whose territory you must pass."

"Just the same—" fumed Steve.

"Furthermore," concluded Beth firmly, "I have chosen you as my mate. And it is written that a Woman must stand by her Man at all times, nor desert him in hour of peril."

There was no answer to that. So, completely floored and none too gracefully, Steve surrendered.

But however little he may have desired her presence, now that she was here, Steve Duane was forced to concede that her aid had proven invaluable. It was she who, by reading of the stars, had reoriented them after an evening of blundering aimlessly through a trackless forest. It was she who stilled the attack of a small band of Rovers, addressing the ruler of these unattached Women in their own slurred dialect and bidding her take her followers to the Mother at Fautnox. It was she, also, who snared wild hares in seines of hair and cotton, dug scrawny *taters* from furrowless fields, and prepared meals for them all. For these, she explained, were the rightful duties of a priestess.

Only in one respect did her company prove more of an embarrassment than a pleasure: the persistence with which she attached herself to him. This was not so bad in the daytime. As a matter of fact, it was good to tramp through leafy dells with the keen, live scent of summer vibrant in your nostrils, watching the sudden scamperings of curious chipmunks startled by your passage, and the arrow-flight of swift-flushing birds; hearing the muted murmur of river waters rushing pell-mell to a distant sea as it had in countless ages past and would for endless aeons; feeling the soft warmth of a shoulder firm against your own in carefree com-

\* Netherland Plaza: One of Cincinnati's finest hotels. It boasts the Queen City's tallest "skyscraper", a structure known as the "Carew Tower".—Ed.

radeship. But it was—well, awkward to say the least, thought Steve, to seek your blanket at night and find it already occupied by one who looked up at you with drowsy expectancy, and damned uncomfortable to spend the night huddled by the glowing embers of a campfire.

CHUCK heard Steve's grumbling with a stare of blank astonishment.

"Well, cripes!" he exploded. "You ain't got nothing to squawk about! You said yourself we was stuck here in this new world forever, didn't you? Well, then—?"

"That's not the point," wrangled Steve. "If we want to change an entire culture and substitute a brand new design for living, we must set the example ourselves in our behavior towards these women. We can't confuse liberty with license."

"You mean," said Chuck, "everything's got to be done fair and square, eh? Marriage, and all that stuff?"

"That's the idea."

"Well, then—" Lafferty stroked his jaw—"why not that? I got eyes in my head. You like the kid, don't you?"

Steve answered, "That's the hell of it; I do! If we had met in a different age, under other circumstances—"

"No dice, pal! If you like her, why don't you set a real honest-to-John example by marrying her? Show the Women that the new system *will* pan out."

"Because," explained Steve bitterly, "it wouldn't be fair to Beth. I'd be getting her under false pretenses. You see, she *still* thinks I'm a god. She's doing this purely and simply because she considers it her duty. Beth's not in love with me. She doesn't even know what love *is*!"

Lafferty shrugged and turned away.

"Well, okay," he said. "It's your

worry. All I got to say is: Some guys want *everything*!"

And so, as the third twilight of their march neared, they approached the stronghold of the Daans. The wild trails gave way to highways of cracked "creet" through which hopeful spires of grass had broken in patches . . . the highway bore them to a deserted village Beth called "Cuvton", which once, Steve knew, had been the populous city of Covington, Kentucky . . . and they stood, at last, on the southern bank of the rolling Ohio looking into the enemy-held fortress of Sinnaty.

In the happier day, not one but a half dozen spans had bridged this river. They were gone now; their rust-encrusted skeletons still thrust redly from the water like the bones of drowned monsters. But where Twentieth Century man had thrown his cantilevers, where a later, barbaric era had allowed them to decay and fall, now stood a gleaming anomaly which brought a gasp to Steve Duane's lips.

"Sweet snakes!" he exclaimed. "Am I nuts, or do you see what I see? A glass bridge!"

"The answer," said Chuck, awed, "is yes. To both."

But the German, von Rath, was staring at the edifice narrowly. Now he said, "A bridge, true. But glass, *nein*!"

"What? But it's transparent!"

"Exactly! Too transparent—do you see what I mean? There is no diffraction whatsoever in that structure."

"But—but if it ain't glass—" stammered Chuck.

"Then it must be," recognized Duane, "plastic!" Like the *lutice* of our day, but of an infinitely superior quality. Right, von Rath? But—but if they can create such things as this, we have been underestimating them. What sort of beings *are* these Daans—"

"Magnificent!" The German's eyes were gleaming with admiration. "What *kultur*, what refinement! Truly, they must be a great people who built this structure—"

And:

"Don't look now," interrupted Chuck somewhat acidly, "but if you'd peek more and peep less you can get a gander at the bozos you're yapping about. 'Cause, unless I'm completely cockeyed, there's a bunch of 'em coming toward us right now!"

All followed the direction of his gaze. He had made no mistake. A band of men, previously concealed by a bulwark of the bridge, was now approaching them. Or—were they men? They were manlike in general build and structure, being neither shorter nor taller than Duane, apparently weighing about the same, but—there were differences.

**E**VOOLUTION on Venus must have somewhere diverged from the path taken by Earth's anthropological mankind, and chosen a pathway derivative from amphibious or piscatorial forebears. For the Daans were dead-white of complexion, their hair was a bleached thatch of silver, their eyes so lowly pigmented that there was no sharp distinction between eyeball and iris. The forward jut of their jaws gave them a truculent, almost carp-like look, and between their fingers—now hovering above the hilts of curiously-wrought weapons tucked in their girdles—stretched translucent films of flesh, a faint, vestigial webbing inherited from aqueous ancestors.

Beth shrank as she looked upon the newcomers, and an exclamation, less of fear than of awed hatred, broke from her lips.

"O Dwain! Now you have seen them, let us flee—"

"Steady!" said Steve soothingly.

"Hold tight. It's all right, my priestess."

Chuck said, "Whaddya mean, hold tight, Steve? Do we just stand here and let them fish-on-legs catch us? Looks to me like it would be smarter to take it on the lam."

"We wait!" ordered Steve succinctly. "Our desire is to get into their fortress, isn't it? I know no better way." He took a step forward, raised an arm in greeting. "Peace, O Daans!" he said. "We are eight wayfarers seeking lodging for the night. Yonder city looks inviting. Can we—?"

He at the head of the armed band grated his men to a halt, stared at the earthlings suspiciously. Then:

"Whence come you?" he demanded.

"From Loovil," equivocated Steve. "We come from the territory of Tucki—"

"So?" rasped the Daan captain. And he crisped swift commands to his followers in the Earth tongue. "We have been fortunate to find those we sought so soon. Seize them! Bind them well that we may take them to the Overlords!"

## CHAPTER VI

Rodrik of Mish-kin

**I**N the moments that followed, Steve Duane could feel his mantle of "godhood" slipping from him; its loss was plain to be seen in the eyes of the Women who were his companions.

He had no doubt that, given their own choice, Jain's warriors would have died then and there rather than submit to the Venusians' bonds. His conciliatory policy had caused him to "lose face" before these battle-scarred veterans. Beth did not like it, nor did Chuck Lafferty approve. Lafferty argued hotly, "It's one thing to walk

into their town, Steve, but it's another to be *toted* in like a trussed duck! There's only six of these white lobsters. Say the word, and—"

"The word," said Steve grimly, "is—*wait!*"

But even he was forced to admit to himself that he hadn't expected this sort of treatment at the hands of the invaders. After all, they had approached the Daan fortress openly, had neither evaded nor attempted to withstand these others. More humane captors would, under the circumstances, have dispensed with the added humiliation of gyves. Not so the Daans. From their harnesses they uncoiled lengths of plastic rope, pliant but incredibly tough. With this they lashed their prisoners, linked them in single file, and herded them across the bridge to the fortress-city.

Vainly Steve tried to reason with the corps captain, demanding to know why he and his comrades had been bound; the Venusian merely grunted and, with the muzzle of his odd hand-weapon, prodded him to silence.

Only von Rath seemed to understand the reason behind the Daans' high-handed treatment. To Steve he said stolidly, "But of course they take us prisoner. They could not well do otherwise, could they? After all, we are their enemies."

"But we surrendered freely. We are entitled to sane and decent treatment —"

The Nazi shook his head disdainfully.

"Ach, you Yankees! Always the dreamers! Warfare is no silly child's game, *mein Leutnant*. It is a grim business. The true warrior never trusts nor turns his back on his antagonist. As for treatment—the conqueror treats his prisoner as just what he is: a conquered foe. That is realism!"

Steve said caustically, "Yes. I know

what you mean. We've all heard about your Nazi concentration camps."

Von Rath shrugged.

"What would you have us do with our captives, coddle them like house-pets?"

"At least," commented Steve, "give them clothing and shelter, sufficient food and medical attention, as we do *your* soldiers in *our* prison-camps."

"But," protested von Rath in astonishment, "you hold so few of our brave soldiers, compared to the vast numbers of yours who have deserted to our side! Moreover, you treat our men well because you know you must. Our Fuehrer has promised that the blood of each slain German will be avenged a hundred times over, *nicht wahr?*"

"Your Fuehrer," snorted Chuck, "is good at promises. He promised your army plenty of fuel oil, too. But you ain't got it yet. Trouble with Adolf is, he picked the wrong method of getting it, attacking the Russians. I know an easier way. All he had to do was build a pipeline from Berlin to the Baku oil-fields, and shove one end of the pipe in his mouth. If he could suck like he can blow, Germany would have more oil than the whole state of Texas!"

VON RATH stiffened, his eyes darting malice.

"That," he stormed, "is dirty democratic propaganda! Our Fuehrer is —"

"Was!" interrupted Steve.

"Eh?"

"Was," repeated Steve wearily, "not is. You two seem to have forgotten where we are. Stop fighting a war that was over fifteen centuries ago!"

Both men stopped wrangling abruptly, glanced at each other rather sheepishly. Chuck said, "Yeah. I guess you got something there, Steve," and von Rath said, "Ja, we have been foolish."

The mighty spire of Carow Tower still stood  
proudly erect amid the ruins of Cincinnati



Even so, his defense of the Daans had reminded Steve again that even yet the Nazi was not altogether to be trusted.

Meanwhile, they had crossed the bridge into the city now known as "Sinnaty." The bridge carried them to the heart of the city; still it was with the utmost difficulty Duane—who had known Cincinnati—oriented himself.

It was as if a Twentieth Century New Yorker suddenly should find himself treading the muddy footpaths of New Amsterdam. The geography was the same, but the street pattern was so completely altered as to be practically unrecognizable. Where had been rows of smart shops and office buildings, there now ranged clusters of tumbledown shacks, shanties so squalid as to be mere pig-stys.

Gone were the fine asphalt avenues; age had crumbled them to dust; rain and snow had dissolved this dust, the feet of careless generations had turned the roadways to a quagmire of muck. Animals—cats, dogs, swine, an occasional horse or cow—roamed the streets unmolested, cropping the sparse grass by the roadsides or rooting through the garbage that befouled the air.

Two witnesses remained that this had once been Ohio's second largest city. Still intact was that great, paved intersection which had been Fountain Square . . . and beside it, heart-stirringly beautiful in this scene of desolation and squalor, still stood proudly erect the mighty spire of Carew Tower. It was toward this building the Daans berded their prisoners.

A few humans, both men and women, were on the streets. But these slunk along in the shadows of the dilapidated houses, and when they glimpsed the Daans, scurried furtively, hastily, into the nearest shelter. Steve Duane's

hands clenched at his sides to see this evidence of mankind's abject peonage, and in that moment he vowed that, though it cost him his life, he must do *something!*—to resurrect the glory which had once been Man's, and the pride which had once been America's!

But if the Overlord's of Daan let their subjects live like beasts, they maintained a high standard of existence for themselves. The "Nedlunplaza" was, if anything, an even more gorgeous building than it had been in the days when its great lobby entertained visitors from forty-eight states, a hundred nations.

It had been converted into a stronghold, a fortress, a citadel at once impregnable and breathtakingly opulent. A layer of some gleaming metal—silver, perhaps—overlay its erstwhile granite frame. Buttressed walls had been stretched about it; from the occasional watchtowers of these, Daan warriors looked down over their territory. At a call, the gates were flung open. The captives marched into the Daans' capital. Across terraced flags to that which had once been the hotel's lobby . . . thence upward in an elevator. . .

"But, hey!" muttered Chuck. "How come this elevator? I thought these people didn't know nothing about—"

Steve grunted tightly.

"Humans don't. They have forgotten everything of our mechanistic civilization. Look at Beth and Jain. Scared to death. This probably seems like magic to them. But there's nothing wrong with the Daans' science. *They* know what these things are—and how to use 'em. Any race which can discover spaceflight—"

"Silence!" rasped the Daan group-leader. "Out, now! This is your prison. You will wait here until sent for."

The moving cage quivered to a stop, the door opened, and the octet of cap-

tives were thrust from it. Those who had brought them thus far accompanied them no farther. Stepping from the elevator, they moved into custody of other Venusians not only armed with the now-familiar crystalline hand-weapons but also equipped with short, thick-handled, barb-tipped cat-o'-nine-tails.

These, without curiosity or comment, loosed them of their bonds and rudely shouldered them through heavy bronze doorway. The door *clanged!* shut and they were alone.

Chuck said, "Well, I'll be damned!"

"WELL, I'll be damned!" repeated Chuck Lafferty. "Of all the hoosegows I've ever been in, this one takes the cake! Steve—are we supposed to be *prisoners*?"

"Nothing else but," grunted Duane succinctly.

"But it's nuts!" declared Chuck. "Prisoners oughta be barred or walled or underground or something—"

"You," Steve told him, "should soak up a little bit of von Rath's realism. Or read Elizabethan poetry. Richard Lovelace was right. 'Stone walls do not a prison make', pal! See those windows?"

"Sure I see 'em. And they ain't barred."

"No. But they look straight down about two hundred feet. That's a long way to tumble. Don't kid yourself. We aren't free just because they removed our bonds and loosed us to do as we will."

Von Rath said soberly, "Duane speaks truth, Lafferty. A high, well-guarded tower is the strongest of all prisons. In the Middle Ages all dungeons were built at the tops of castles. Chillon . . . *der Rathaus* . . . the bloody tower of London. This is but another evidence of the Daans' superiority over

humans. Being wiser, stronger, better organized, they can afford to be contemptuous of their prisoners. They need not bind us. One rebellious move, and they can starve us into submission."

"That's right," agreed Steve. "As a matter of fact, there's only one factor in our favor—and that is the very thing you just mentioned, von Rath. Their contempt for humankind. They have had only to deal with—well, with the poor barbarians of this day. They don't suspect that we three are different. Sharper, more resourceful, and perhaps almost as intelligent as themselves."

The priestess Beth had been listening wide-eyed and comprehending perhaps only half of what she heard. Now, with a small sign of obeisance, "And what," she asked, "do we now, O Dwain? Wait quietly, or prepare magic to destroy our foes upon their return?"

"First," Steve told her, "we get one thing straight. You've got to stop addressing me like something on a marble pedestal. Our chances of success depend on the Venusians not finding out who we are. So lay off that, 'O Dwain!' stuff."

"It shall be as you say, O Dwain," agreed the dust-gold maiden meekly. "But—but how should one address one of the gods—"

"I'm not one of the—Oh, hell!" snorted Steve. "Do we have to go through all that again? Look, Beth—I've told you time and time again that I am a man!"

"Yes, Master. A Man-god."

"Man-god your—Well, never mind! If I were one of the Men of your Clan, you'd call me by my given name—right? Well, from now on that's the ticket. I'm Steve, get it? And this is Chuck, and this is—what's your name, von Rath?—oh, yes, I remember—Erich!"



"Steve . . . Chuck . . . Ay-rik. Very well, Wise Slumberer. Henceforth it shall be as you say. Jain, you hear?"

"Yes, priestess. We hear and obey."

"Good!" sighed Steve. "Well, now, that's settled—let's take a look around this joint. I don't see any PRIVATE: KEEP OUT signs on the doors, so I guess we're free to wander."

**F**OR in addition to the windows which lighted the room, several doors other than the bronze portal through which they had entered off it. Toward the nearest of these Steve led his wondering group.

The door opened easily. And it opened upon a scene which surprised them all. They were not the only prisoners in the tower of Nedlunplaza. The chamber into which they strode was vast, and thickly strewn with humans of all ages, colors and descriptions. Conditions, too. Many were of the furtive, fearful type Duane had seen in the streets of Sinnaty, others were "Wild Ones" like Jon and his tribe—but a few were of a type whose existence in this era the time-exiles had not even suspected. Strong-thewed, intelligent-seeming Men like themselves!

At their entrance, all heads turned at once. Voices raised, for the most part in mourning, but a scattered few in a sort of gloating triumph. And this spontaneous roar roused to movement; the gleeful cries coalesced into a single word:

"Women!"

So swiftly that even Steve Duane, whose mind usually accepted new circumstances with lightning speed, was shocked into immobility, male figures rose and hurtled forward toward the newcomers!

But if the three time-travellers were stunned motionless, not so the women of the Tucki Clan. Barbaric they might

be, superstitious they undoubtedly were—but their defensive reflexes had been trained in a hard school; the bitter school of experience.

In the twinkling of an eye, the warrior captain Jain had cried, "*On guard!*"—and like automatons trained to split-second precision she and her three fighters had whipped steel from scabbards and formed a shield before their priestess and their gods.

Against this biting rampart, not even such a woman-hungry sea of males dared dash itself. The cries assumed an angry, baffled tone, but the attack slowed . . . stalled. For an instant there was silence, then one voice, boldly desperate, cried, "*On them! What mean their weapons? They are but four, and we are many—*"

Steve understood, now, why the Daans had not removed their sidearms while in all other ways holding them in strict bondage. Here was sickening evidence of the difficulties he faced in welding the pitiful remnants of humanity to a force which might overthrow Earth's invaders. Here were men who, though serfs to a master race, spent their blood, their hate, their energies upon each other rather than those who should be their natural enemies.

Eyes blazing, he thrust himself into the forefront beside Jain; his cry was a flaming challenge.

"What manner of men are you? We came in peace—but if war is what you want, then—come on! Who would first like the hot blood let from his veins?"

Answer came from an unexpected source. From the far side of the chamber . . . from another door which opened suddenly . . . appeared one tall and fair as Stephen Duane himself. In a glance the newcomer appraised the situation, his voice put an end to the mob's mutterings.

"Hold! What have we here? Aaah—new Women?" His cold, gray-blue eyes swept the newly-arrived group, lighted appreciatively as they came to rest on Beth, who had taken her place at Steve's side. "Good! Subdue the men and divide the warriors as you will. But touch not the golden one. She is mine!"

Chuck gasped, "Hoddya like *that* for nerve, Steve!"

Steve didn't like it. Not a bit. His brow darkened dangerously. "Yours?" he cried. "Guess again, buster! She's not yours till you take her! By what right—?"

"By the right of the power," mocked the other, "that is mine, stranger. I am Rodrik. Rodrik of Mish-kin—ruler of the prisoners of Nedlunplaza!"

## CHAPTER VII

### Lady Loela

CHUCK LAFFERTY sniffed, "Ruler, eh? Well, a ruler's only got twelve inches, mister—and I got eighteen inches of good steel right here in my fist. If you'd like to—"

"Wait, Chuck!" crisped Steve. Things were beginning to size up a little better now. He stared at the self-styled "ruler of Nedlunplaza" thoughtfully. He said, "Ruler by right of your power, is that it, Rodrik? Then you are strongest of all here?"

"I am the strongest of arm," proclaimed Rodrik, "the fiercest of heart, most skilled with sword and lance, wisest and most cunning—"

"Bashfulest, too, maybe?" suggested Lafferty.

"A shrinking violet," grinned Steve. "Only don't forget to cross the 't' in 'shrinking'." And to Rodrik—"I too am a ruler in my native territory, Rod-

rik. Therefore I challenge you to pit your strength against mine, here and now, for the prize of these Women who are my own."

"It is not meet," said the ruler disdainfully, "that I should soil my hands against one so puny. I, Rodrik, who alone and unaided have slain the fierce jungle wolf, snared the sharp-fanged boar with bare hands, shattered the ranks of a warrior Clan—"

"Child's play!" taunted Steve. "In my youth, Rodrik, I met and bested the horrible Intercollegiate Fisticuffs Champion, fighting against staggering odds under the sacred and dreadful Marquis of Queenshury rules! Can you say as much?"

The priestess Beth, who until this moment had seemed fearful not so much for her own safety as for that of the man she was pledged to protect, now turned to Chuck dubiously.

"Is—is this really so, O Chuck?" she murmured. "He *did* destroy the terrible *intakul*—*intrical*—?"

"Sister," chuckled Lafferty, "he *moldered* him! Left-jabbed him silly, then crossed a kayo to the solar plexus. If Rodrik of Mish-kin gets sucked into this deal, he's gonna get tagged on the whiskers—but plenty!"

"The language of the gods," whispered the girl in awe, "is strange to my humble ears. But I am reassured. What can I do to help?"

"Just say," grinned Chuck, "the magic words: 'Sock him, Steve!' That oughta help."

The priestess made a swift, pious movement. "Your suggestion, O Chuck, is my command."

Meanwhile, Rodrik of Mish-kin had pressed forward to confront Steve. Ranged face to face, there was a startling similarity between the two men. Both were over six feet tall, both were blond of hair, fair of skin, blue of eye.

But there the likeness ended. Steve's brow was smooth, unfurrowed; his lips were drawn in an amused, almost hopeful, half smile. The other man's eyes were sultry, his lips drawn thin with anger at having his authority thus challenged.

For a long moment he glared at Steve, as if the very ferocity of his looks might cow his antagonist. But finally it was he, not Steve, who dropped his eyes. He turned to his followers.

"Enough of this!" he snarled. "The stranger lies. Destroy him and his fellow males. The Women are ours."

AND again the hands of the eight adventurers tightened upon their hilts. But strangely the blood-lust of the prison band seemed to have cooled. One who had pressed most ardently now voiced the doubt of his fellows.

"That we cannot do now, O Rodrik," he demurred. "He has put the question—challenged you, the ruler of our band, to private combat. The challenge must be met. It is the Law."

Rodrik's fair cheeks flamed with sudden anger.

"Fool! Can you not see he is a braggart and a liar? At him—"

"It is the Law!" repeated the other man stubbornly.

"Very well, then!" cried Rodrik, goaded out of patience. "See how I meet and destroy this interloper—"

And in one blurring motion he whirled, lashed his sword from his belt, and hurled himself upon Steve.

But Duane's smile had not masked carelessness. Fast as Rodrik moved, he moved even more swiftly. His blade met that of the other in midair with a chilling *zzzzing!* Shock numbed his opponent's fingers, a twist sent the sword flying across the room. Rodrik cried aloud, a cry of dismay mingled

with fear. His hand darted to his harness, withdrew, flashed — and winged death sang past Steve's ear as he left his feet in a diving tackle.

His shoulder smashed his foeman's knees. Rodrik staggered backward, arms flailing, and Steve pressed his advantage. With a lunge, he was on his feet again, closing in on Rodrik, battering him with sledgehammer lefts and rights. The ruler of Nedlunplaza's prisoners moaned and spat blood. Powerful man that he was, this type of onslaught, performed under the "sacred and dreadful" Marquis of Queensbury rules, was beyond his ken.

Realizing this, Steve relented. Face close to that of his antagonist, Duane offered, "Enough? Are you satisfied now, Rodrik? Do you yield?"

The reply was half-choked, gasping. "I . . . yield . . . stranger."

"Good!" said Steve. "Then—*aaagh!*" His proffer of peace and amity ended in a retching groan. For as his fists fell to his sides, Rodrik moved with devilish treachery. His booted foot found Duane's groin, driving Steve to his knees, twisting and nauseated, lips working to hold back the sickly bile churning within him.

Chuck Lafferty's outraged scream ripped the darkness which threatened to engulf him.

"The damned, sneaking scoundrell Steve—are you all right? Out of the way! Let me at—"

In that moment, while Steve was helpless and Chuck still too far away to be of any assistance, Rodrik of Mishkin could have won his battle—had he dared. But he had learned a wholesome respect for his opponent, and it was his way to end the fight with cold steel, not with the vigor of his own fists. He whirled, eyes darting about the room, found what he was looking for, and raced toward his sword.

But rage, cold and deadly, flooded Stephen Duane like an icy cascade. From somewhere deep within him came strength he had not known he possessed. He lurched to his feet, threw himself after his enemy. They met again before Rodrik's hand could clutch the sword—and their meeting was the downfall of Rodrik of Mish-kin.

For no peace offer was granted him now. With deadly fury Steve went to work on his opponent. His blows cut like the hite of an axe in heartwood: right and left to the body until Rodrik's mouth gaped like an angry wound, his knees sagged beneath him, his guard pawed futilely at the battering rams which bent him double . . . then lefts and rights to the unprotected face, hard knuckles raising great welts on his fair cheeks, welts which tore and bled. . . .

Then:

"This one," rasped Steve, "is on the house!" And he let it go. A haymaker from the floor that caught Rodrik on his way down to meet it. Rodrik sighed once, wearily—then his eyes rolled back in his head. His legs seemed to melt beneath him; he sprawled on the floor like a flayed carcass.

Steve Duane bent over him, not again trustful.

"Had . . . enough . . . sweetheart?" he puffed.

Rodrik answered nothing. He had had quite enough. Too much. He was deep in the arms of Morpheus. . . .

IT was then Beth the priestess broke from her place beside Chuck to throw herself on her knees before Steve. Her dust-gold hair tumbled to the floor; beneath its shimmering veil she took one bruised band and touched it tenderly, reverently, to her lips.

"Now canst Thou no longer deny

Thy godhood, O Mighty Dwain!" she cried raptly. "For surely none but a living god could wage so fierce a battle!"

At another time, Steve might have laughed. But this fight had done something to him, too. It had filled him with an impatient fire which swept him free of all inhibitions.

With a swift, half-angry, and most ungodlike abruptness he raised the girl, yanked her into the circle of his arms, lowered his face to hers,

"All right, then!" he yelled. "I'm tired of arguing with you. I'm a god, then, if that's the way you want it!"

And spurred by impulse, by a hunger whose depth even he had not realized, his lips found hers bruisingly, crushingly . . . warmed themselves at the swift-fanning blaze which awakened beneath them. For a moment in which Time itself ceased to exist he felt the oneness of their pulses pounding like myriad hammers of flame. Then he released her, spun to confront those about him.

"Is there any other," he demanded, "who would like to take Rodrik's place?"

His question brought neither defiance nor avowal, but something more astonishing. It brought—surprise! The eyes of Rodrik's erstwhile lieutenant lifted, and his voice echoed bewilderment.

"But, no, my lord," he said for all. "Who would lift a hand against you now? You are our ruler."

Steve stared at him in amazement.

"Come again? I'm your—?"

"Our new ruler. But, of course, my lord. You have bested Rodrik of Mish-kin in the trial by combat. Henceforth we follow your commands. It is the Law."

Chuck chortled delightedly.

"Now, that," he said, "is what I call

a pretty good law! Hyah, Your Majesty! Whateth is nexteth on ye program?"

"Nuts," said Steve, "to you!" He frowned at his new lieutenant. "We have but just come here. There is much we need to know—er—"

"My name is Jak," supplied the other. "Jak of Norlinz, men call me. I shall try to explain anything you would know. But first—" He jerked his head contemptuously toward the prostrate figure between them—"shall we dispose of this?"

"Yes," said Steve unthinkingly. "Snap him out of it and—Hey! What are you doing!"

FOR at his word, two men had stepped forward, lifted the body of Rodrik and carried it to the nearest window. In another instant the vanquished chieftain would have been flying on his way two hundred feet to the stone courtyard below. They paused uncertainly. One said, "But, surely—Oh! Pardon, my lord! You would put him to the sword yourself?"

"Release him!" snapped Steve. "Give him water, and tend his hurts!"

"But—but the Law!"

For the second time since his arrival in this strange, semi-civilized world, Stephen Duane invoked a defiant phrase. This time he did it with more assurance. His eyes hardened, tiny white knots gathered at the corners of his jaw. "I *am* the Law!" he said. "Release him! It is folly to waste good manpower in such—Ah! You've come to, Rodrik?"

The deposed ruler, released, had somehow managed to stay on his feet. He cringed at the tone of Steve's voice.

"Mercy, O Stranger!" he cried. "Be merciful—"

Von Rath said thickly, "This is not wisdom, Stephen Duane. I have warned

you, never is it safe to allow an enemy to live—"

"I'm handling this," interrupted Duane. "Rodrik, do you pledge yourself to keep the peace from now on, acknowledge me your master?"

"M-master?" The Mish-kinite's pallid eyes were less clouded now; they fastened on Steve as if seeing him for the first time. They roved from the top of his ash-blond head to the tips of his doeskin sandals. A strange, new light which might have been awe . . . or understanding . . . or a curious sort of *fellowship* . . . dawned in his eyes. Aloud he said, "Yes! I do so yield and acknowledge, O Master!" But this was solely for the ears of their audience. He moved to Duane's side, and as he bent his head in token of submission he whispered softly, "Forgive me, brother! I did not understand. I should have known when I looked upon you—"

"Eb?" exclaimed Steve, startled. "What's that?"

"Hush, brother! Let not the others hear. Later you and I shall discuss . . . the Plans. But now—" And he raised his voice again—"Let me show you about the prison, O strong new leader. None is more qualified than I to explain."

And *that* much, at any rate, was true. So, stifling his curiosity for the time being, Steve permitted the former leader to show the way through the tower-goal of Nedlunplaza. But still wary, still grimly watchful, Jain's bodyguard of Women ranged themselves between him and the other prisoners. And to his arm clung the priestess Beth.

Steve laughed at her for this. "You cling to me, O priestess," he taunted her in mock outrage. "You dare place warm hands upon my flesh! Is this how a mere mortal approaches a god?"

But the dust-gold head lifted; the girl's eyes met his levelly, softly, thoughtfully. And the voice of Beth was alive with a strange new vibrancy as she said:

"Aye, even so, my lord; perhaps I am presumptuous. But there was magic in the touching-of-mouths you just taught me. Mad magic. I know not why—but for the first time it sings in my heart that perhaps you have spoken the truth. My mind acknowledges you a god, but here—" And she touched her breast—"I feel you are in truth—a Man!"

CONSIDERABLY later, after they had been led through the labyrinthine series of connecting chambers and corridors which comprised this prison—this whole floor—of Nedlun-plaza, Steve dismissed all his new followers save Jak of Norlinz. To this young stalwart he had taken a liking. Of him he asked the question which had perplexed him ever since entering the citadel.

"Jak, you are no weakling male like those utilized for breeders by Beth's clan. Nor are you like the Wild Ones. You are a man like myself. How is this?"

Jak looked puzzled.

"I do not understand, Steve. How else should it be?"

The priestess Beth broke in fiercely, "You know full well how it should be, Jak of Norlinz! The Women rule Tizathy everywhere! And guard your tongue, male upstart! The sacred name of 'Steve' is not yours to use—"

"That will do, Beth," ordered Steve. "I asked him to call me that. And it is obvious that the Women do *not* rule everywhere. Not in Jak's New Orleans, nor in Rodrik's Michigan."

"But it is written in the holy books," argued Beth, "that the Men and

Women fought, and the Women were victors—"

Jak nodded. "I begin to understand, Steve. We, too, have a legend of the days when the sexes warred. But where I came from the Men subdued the rebels. In my territory Men and Women mate . . . they work together hand in hand, and enjoy such happiness as the Daans' harsh rule permits. Thus it is, also, in many territories I know. In Zoni and Mexico . . . in Bama and Sippi."

"But," frowned Chuck, "how about this here now place Beth just mentioned: Tizathy? Where's that?"

"Why, that is *all* places," explained Jak laboriously. "All territories are but part of Tizathy. It is the Land of the Ancients, over which ruled Jarg and Taamuz, Ibrim and—"

"I see," said Steve softly. "I understand now. It is the whole, one-time American nation. Don't you see, Chuck? *'My country . . . Tizathy . . .'*"

Jak said, "Yes. You know the Song, Steve?"

"I know it." Duane's forehead creased. "But how is it you languish in a Sinnaty prison, Jak?"

Jak shrugged. "I was restless. I wandered in search of—well, I know not what. Perhaps a territory where there were no Daans. I was captured here, questioned. I could not account for myself, so—here I am. Thus it was with many of the prisoners. Rodrik . . . Pawl . . . Alan of Washtun."

"But were you free to return to your homeland, Jak, could you rouse others like yourself to come northward?"

"Perhaps. But why?"

"For the purpose of—" began Steve.

HE did not finish his sentence. For at that moment came a frightened messenger from the outer chamber. "It

is the Daans, O ruler!" he told Steve fearfully. "They are come to take you for the Questioning."

Chuck stirred fretfully.

"What does that mean, Steve? The third degree? Say, we've got an organization now. What say we spunk up and give them toads a dose of—"

"No," said Steve, rising swiftly. "That would only tip our hand. And besides, they don't want to see us any more than we want to see *them*. That's what we came here for. Let's go!"

Thus it was that, a few minutes later, the recently captured band of Tuckians and time-exiles, surrounded by armed Daans, ascended in the elevator to the topmost stage of Carew Tower. They debouched from their lift into a place which had once upon a time been a swank nightclub, a glass-encased roof garden wherein beneath the light of the stars gay humans had wine and dined and danced.

Age had shattered the glass panes here as elsewhere throughout Nedlun-plaza, but in this place the windows had not gone unrepaired. They were filled with that odd, transparent plastic of which the Sinnaty bridge had been made. The whole chamber was a gigantic council-hall, at the head of which sat in opulent splendor the Venusian vice-regents.

A fanfare greeted their entrance into the hall, and a guard, with the haft of his knout, prodded Steve roughly to his knees. Then a voice, curiously gentle and mellow, issued a command . . . and from somewhere roused the strident cry of an equerry:

"Let the prisoners rise! Bring them forward, that they may be seen by the Overlord Loala!"

Again the whip dug Steve's back. Stiffing an urge to turn and let his captor have one, Steve rose, took a step forward, lifted his eyes and—al-

most gasped aloud in utter amazement.

For the central figure of those enthroned before him was—though not altogether Earthly—unmistakably feminine. *The Overlord Loala was a woman!*

## CHAPTER VIII

### Honor for Sale

THERE was one thing about Chuck Lafferty which could be depended upon. He was a creature of habit. Nor time nor place nor condition of servitude could vary his set response to given circumstances. When he saw a pretty woman, he gave vent to his admiration in a typically Chuck Laffertyian way. He did so now. He opened his eyes wide. And he whistled.

"*Phwee-ew!* What a pigeon!"

Steve muttered, "Quiet, you dope! Do you want to get us all in a jam?"

But he had to concede that the Overlord Loala was—as Chuck's whistle had intimated—something to make a man sit up and take notice.

The amphibious heritage of the Venusian race did not display itself so blatantly in the females as in the men. Aside from the fact that her skin was abnormally pale, almost alabaster, the Lady Loala could have passed anywhere as one of Earth's fairest daughters. Her fingers were not joined with vestigial webs, as in the case of the Venusian men, nor was there any prognathous cast to her jaw. Her hair was a silver mantle, billowing down over soft and rounded shoulders . . . her eyes were not colorless, but irised with lambent, gray-green pools, slumbrously inviting as a cool grotto on a torrid day. Her body was slim and lithe and perfectly molded. If Steve had suspected the Daans might

be ovariparous, a glance at her contours convinced him otherwise. This Venusian was definitely, decidedly, most invitingly, mammalian.

There were others seated on the dais beside her . . . a sort of Council, Stephen Duane guessed. These were obviously Venusians of a higher rank and culture than the fighting-men who had been their captors. They were less coarse of feature, less tagged with the stigmata of their squamous ancestry, more Earthly in appearance. One curious phenomenon which impressed itself upon Steve's notice was that the higher types of Daans seemed more highly pigmented than the lower classes. He could only guess at an explanation, but his off-hand hunch was that this differentiation of types paralleled the difference between human-kind and the less fortunate anthropoids of Earth.\*

But there was no time for further conjecture, because the Lady Loala had now lifted one hand in a delicate gesture, and he and his associates were being summoned forward.

The beautiful Overlord looked down upon them with an unusual curiosity. Upon Steve she bent her most interested glances; to him she spoke.

"We have been told you approached our city from the south. Is this true, Earthman? Whence came you, and what is your name?"

"I am called Steve. Steve of—er—

\* A corollary to advancement in culture seems to be increase in various sensitivities, both mental and physical. Thus, as humans are more delicately evolved than their arboreal ancestors, they are correspondingly more prone to the ailments which accompany such evolution: deafness, blindness, loss of the sense of smell, etc.

Similarly, the higher classes of Daans might be expected to have become more highly pigmented than their amphibious predecessors. Physical coloration would be a refinement of physique to a race which, under the cloud-blanketed skies of Venus, would in its elemental stages show no reaction to diffuse actinic rays.—Ed.

M.I.T.\*\* And it is true we came from the south," equivocated Duane. "We came from the territory of Loovil."

Loala frowned daintily. "I know not this village of Emmiety, but we shall send a corps to conquer and subdue it," she said. "So you came from Loovil? With permission of the Daan commander there, I presume? You have your travel certificate?"

This was something Steve had not expected. But there was no sense in pyramiding falsehoods until he had constructed a fabric which might destroy them all. He put a bold face on the matter.

"WE have not, O Daughter of the Dawn Star," he said. "We left Loovil secretly because we were not happy under the treatment of the local rulers."

A gasp of outrage shuddered through his listeners. The Daan at Loala's left scowled, spoke harshly. "Loala, we have heard enough. They stand self-convicted of rebellion. Destroy them!"

But the Daan at the Overlord's right advised gently, "Wait! The human is honest, even though guilty. Let us hear him through."

Steve glanced at their befriender swiftly. Never had he expected to hear such words from a Venusian. But this one was a rather decent looking chap . . . grave, quiet, gentle . . . and Steve spoke gratefully.

"Thank you, O Master."

"Nonsense!" rapped the first advisor. "Okuno is too soft-hearted! Let us have an end of this; make an example of these temerarious humans—"

"Silence, Malgro. I make the decisions here." And she turned to Steve

\*\* Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in Duane's era one of America's finest colleges of science and engineering.—Ed.



again. "Tell us, Steve of Emmeity—did you, perchance, in your travels pass through a village known as 'Fautnox'?"

"Fautnox!" exclaimed Chuck. "Why—"

But Steve, a warning bell clamoring deep within him, silenced his friend with a swift, stabbing glare. He repeated the name wonderingly.

"Fautnox? Nay, Princess of Beauty. That name is new to me? Was it upon our route? We did not see it."

And—unexpectedly, Stephen Duane learned much about the Venusian race. Or, rather, about the Daan women . . . Loala in particular. For the term of respect which had come to his lips instinctively proved that to Venusian womankind, as to their Earthly sisters, flattery was a potent weapon. At the words, "Princess of Beauty," Loala's alabaster features softened, her gray-green eyes widened appreciatively, and to her lips came the faintest suggestion of a smile. When she spoke again, her voice was even more mellow.

"Nay? That is too bad . . . human called Steve—"

"He lies!" interrupted the advisor Malgro. "Fautnox *must* be along that route somewhere. All reports tell us—"

"Gently! Gently!" again soothed his fellow advisor. And the Lady Loala turned to him almost impatiently. "I must ask you to remember, Malgro, that I am Overlord of this city. If you cannot restrain yourself, I shall conduct this inquiry in private!" Then, to Steve: "Perhaps, Earthman, you chanced to hear on your journey somewhat concerning certain mythical creatures known as—the Slumberers?"

THIS time the warning bell within Steve brazened into strident tocsin. Though his face was an impassive

mask, his brain was churning furiously. How to answer? To confess himself one of the Slumberers might, and probably would, mean instant death. But to deny all knowledge of that which must be a legend common to all earthlings. . . .

Instinct guided him aright. He made a swift, pious gesture, said in an awed tone, "But of course all men know of the Slumberers, O Lady of Loveliness! They sleep the endless sleep in some unknown chamber . . ."

"That's not what we have heard!" snarled the restive Malgro. "We know very well the Slumberers—"

"Malgro!" The Lady Loala, who had looked even more approvingly upon Steve during his last speech, now flared into sudden anger. Duane realized, noting the swift sharpness of her voice, the fire brightening in her eyes, that this was no woman to underestimate. She might seem soft and languid, but actually she was as brittle, as coldly ruthless, as any of her followers. She demonstrated, now, her power. "I have warned you twice against these interruptions! Now I act!"

"This interview is terminated! Members of the Daan Council, you are dismissed. Guards—take the prisoners back to their quarters. Clear the chamber—quickly! No! Do not take that one—" As two guards stepped forward to prod Steve toward the door—"He remains. I will continue this investigation in private!"

And apparently Steve had not misjudged the character of Loala. Her fury spurred others to action—but quick! In the space of minutes the Daan advisors had departed . . . Beth and Chuck, von Rath and Jain, the Tucki warriors, had been herded from the hall . . . and he stood alone before the still-smouldering Overlord.



"He lies!" interrupted the advisor, Malgro

It was then, and then only, Loala stopped smouldering. Her anger died, her features softened, and her voice was again enticingly mellow.

"There! That is better. Now we can talk in peace."

And there was dignity in her voice—but Steve noted something more significant in her actions. For as she spoke, one soft hand lifted—and adjusted the silver strands of her hair! He had seen others do that. It was not alone the gesture of a Daan . . . it was the gesture of a woman, self-conscious before a man. His eyes lighted with something that was half amusement. He said softly:

"Yes, O Mistress of a Thousand Charms. We are alone. It is *much* better this way."

The Lady Loala glanced at him strangely, assumed an air of indignation.

"What? Seek not to beguile me with soft words, man of Earth! Remember your humble place!"

Steve moved a step nearer, bowing submissively. "No words are enough to describe your loveliness, O Lady of Grace. Any man, be he Daan or Earthman, must be humble before you."

"You mean that?" mused the Daan ruler. "You find me attractive, Steve of Emmeity?"

"Do my eyes," breathed Duane, "not answer for me?"

AND his eyes, lifting, met hers for a long, tingling moment. A moment in which Steve realized that his playacting had overreached its purpose . . . that he *did* almost believe it! For the Lady Loala, human or inhuman, was incredibly beautiful. There was warmth, aliveness, allurements in her arms . . . in her eyes . . . her lips . . . in the rhythmic rise and fall

of her breast. Were it not for the memory of another woman, dust-gold, and the recollection of lips but a short time ago warm upon his own, Steve could have mistaken the emotion now throbbing through his veins.

But in the comparison lay the answer to his problem. Beth stirred him, too—but not as this woman stirred him. A hunger awakened within him at the nearness of Loala, but for Beth he felt something stronger, greater, finer . . . something which was not only of the body but of the heart and spirit as well. What he felt toward Beth was love. What he felt toward Loala was simple, unvarnished, primitive . . .

Her answer, interrupting the chaos of his thoughts, came as a staggering surprise. She, too, seemed to have been pondering. Now she reached a decision. She nodded her head abruptly; her hands made a gesture of finality.

"So be it!" she said. "You please me, too, Steve of Emmeity. It is permitted that those who so desire may take earthling consorts. I now so desire. You shall move into my chambers!"

Steve's gulp was almost audible. He felt, suddenly, like a man who has been teasing a caged lion—and discovers too late that the door of the cage is wide open! He had not guessed that a Daan—especially a Daan Overlord—would take an Earthman consort. Now he recognized that this, too, was not without precedent in human history. It was customary for conquerors to take into their tents, their castles, their *harems*, such members of a subdued race as attracted them. Alexander . . . Darius . . . Catherine of Russia . . .

He could see himself installed as human favorite in the equipage of the

Lady Loala. An amusing plaything, a man maintained in pampered luxury for the sole and simple purpose of amorous dalliance.

He said, "But—but, my Lady—"

The chameleon-swift eyes of the Overlord darkened.

"Then you were but flattering, Earthman? You sought to deceive me? Now, by the gods of Daan—"

"Nay, Princess of Delight!" swore Steve feverishly. "I only say that—that it is too great an honor. There lives no man, Daan or human, who would not gladly die to win such a prize. But I am a simple barbarian, lately-sprung from the wilderness. Your Council would take offense. . . ."

His wild guessing struck a vulnerable point. Again the Lady Loala nodded, this time speculatively.

"There is truth in what you say, Steve of Emmeity. You have not been tested nor tried; you have not been given the Treatment. But if you were, none could object. Were you given a mission to fulfill, and fulfilled it capably—" Her eyes lighted suddenly. "Yes! That is how it must be. So you would win my favors, Steve?"

"Who would not, O Mistress of Glory?"

"Then it can be arranged—on one condition. On the condition that you renounce your own race and become a human follower of the Daans. Say, Steve of Emmelty—will you join the Brotherhood?"

## CHAPTER IX

### Rebel—and Die!

"THE Brotherhood, O Loala?" repeated Steve wonderingly. The silver princess of Venus smiled a faint half-smile.

"You have not heard of it, Steve?"

"But, no, my Lady—"

"Few common Earthlings have," said Loala. "Yet the Brotherhood numbers scores . . . hundreds . . . each member selected from the cream of the human clans. Only those are invited to join who, by their physical characteristics, are akin to the Daans—as you, Steve, approximate the coloration and bodily structure of our master race.

"The Brotherhood is an organization of Earthlings who have joined us in the creation of a Daan civilization here on Earth. Because they have allied themselves to us, they have been granted great rights and privileges; because they are human, they may come and go amongst their fellows and bring us reports of what transpires amongst the barbarians. Thus we keep informed as to human schemes and plottings, and can act swiftly to quell incipient rebellion wherever it may rear."

"A—a Fifth Column," gasped Steve, "of humans!"

"Fifth Column?"

"It is a phrase," explained Steve hurriedly, "of the clan whence I sprang. It means—er—those who work for the common good of all."

But her words had cleared up one tiny mystery which had baffled him. He understood, now, the sudden comradeship exhibited by Rodrik of Mishkin. "*Forgive me, brother!*" the fellow had whispered. "*You and I shall discuss . . . the Plans.*" Rodrik was, like himself, a tall, fair-skinned blond, a human of the physiological type approved by the pallid Daans. Then Rodrik was a member of the Brotherhood; no true prisoner at all, but a spy masquerading as a captive to anticipate such attempts at escape as might be formulated by the Nedlunplaza malcontents!

"I see," said the Lady Loala, and studied him closely. "Well, Steve of

Emmeity—what say you?"

Steve struggled to repress the grin of satisfaction which crept unbidden to his lips. There was only one possible answer. Where else could he work better for the liberation of his fellow humans than from the trusted ranks of those who conspired to hold them in subjection?

He said humbly, "I am overwhelmed, O Loala. Gladly will I join my cause to yours, to serve in what humble fashion I may."

Approval, mingled with relief, lifted the shadows of doubt from the Daan woman's eyes.

"That is good, Steve. After learning the secret, had you decided otherwise it would have been necessary to—seal your lips forever. Now is the way open to our future enjoyment of each other."

And she smiled at him languidly, caressingly. Steve felt the tips of his ears burning; he cleared his throat uneasily.

"Yes, Princess. But you spoke of a—test, a task to be fulfilled?"

Loala nodded.

"And a most important one, Steve. With the morning, you shall return to the woodlands of Tucki whence you came, seeking a hidden refuge known to humans as 'Fautnox.' There you shall investigate for us the truth of a rumor which has reached our ears: that certain legendary figures known as the 'Slumberers' have awakened."

**B**UT, how—" Steve caught himself just in time. A moment more and he would have asked how the Daans had already learned of something which had occurred but three days since, and in so doing would have revealed his own knowledge of the fact. Even so, he was stricken with a new and deeper respect for the espionage system of the Venusian conquerors. It

must be a strong and far-reaching organization, this Brotherhood of traitors. "The—the Slumberers, O Princess? The Slumberers have awakened?"

Loala was eyeing him shrewdly, appraisingly.

"This means much to you, Steve of Emmeity?" she asked sharply. "The Slumberers are gods of your clan, too?"

"Not gods," denied Duane. "Just—legends. Stories in which none of us greatly believe. But there is danger in this rumor, Princess. If the hordes believe it, trouble may arise—"

"That," nodded Loala, her suspicions again allayed, "we know. Of course the fable is fantastic. We of a higher culture realize that gods, as such, do not exist, and that no mortals can sleep for hundreds of years, as it is credited the Slumberers have done."

"Nevertheless, the rumor must be tracked down, those who started it must be apprehended and punished, and—above all else—this hidden village of 'Fautnox' must be found and laid waste. Too long has it been a thorn in our side. Well, Steve, can you fulfill this task?"

"I can try, O my Princess," said Steve.

"Good. You shall receive the Treatment now, and in the morning you shall start."

"Alone, O Loala?"

"How else?"

"If I am to appear as a human of my Clan," declared Steve, "it is needful that I be accompanied by those who came to Sinnaty with me. Amongst my people it is customary that a journeying male should always have a corps of female warriors to protect him and a neophyte to prepare for his needs. Were I to approach this 'Fautnox' otherwise, my motives might be suspect—"

Loala shrugged negligently.

"Very well. It shall be as you say. And now—the Treatment that makes you truly one of us, a full-fledged member of the Brotherhood!"

She clapped her hands, and from a room adjacent the council hall came armed guards. Into their care Loala placed Steve, issuing crisp commands in a strange, rhythmic, labial tongue Steve had not heard before, the tongue of her native Venus. When she finished, the guards motioned Steve to come with them—this time by nods, rather than rough elbowing—and he was led from the room.

What sort of ceremony comprised the "Treatment," he had no idea. A swearing-in of some sort . . . perhaps even some highly involved and dramatic ritual was more or less what he expected. But Steve had failed to take into consideration the technology of the Daans. He was reminded, sharply, that they were, after all, a mechanically cultured race when he was led into a chamber which—save for the fact that most of the instruments and machines were constructed of that ubiquitous plastic material beloved by Daan engineers—was remarkably similar to a scientific laboratory of his own era.

Most prominent, as well as most curious, device in the entire room was a large, transparent cabinet placed centrally on a raised platform. Verniers and controls studded a panel on the outside of this cabinet, sheathed wires fed current to tubes ranged about its perimeter—and within it stood a large, metallic chair equipped with a headpiece.

FOR an instant, a tremor of indecision shook Stephen Duane. His experience dictated that this could be one thing only: an execution chamber!

The thing inside looked exactly like the dreaded "electric chair" of his vanished era. In a moment of brief panic he glanced about him wildly but—

But his guards were smiling pleasantly—as pleasantly as their taut, colorless features would allow—and their nods motioning him into the cabinet were almost benign. With a shrug that cast his fate into the hands of whatever gods of earth might accept responsibility, Steve stepped into the cabinet, sat upon the chair, allowed the headpiece to be fastened down about his skull, watched curiously as a technician set stops and dials, pressed a switch.

Slowly the bulbs rimming the cabinet glowed into red life. The hum of current droned in Steve's ears, lifted to a scream, a howl, a raging torrent of sound that smashed upon his brain with the impact of a million surging seas!

Every fibre of his body tensed with the strain of an electric agony coursing through his veins. But he was not aware that his flesh had drawn taut with a myriad, tingling horripilations; he knew only that wave upon wave of torment was beating at his brain . . . suns whirled, flared, burst into searing fragments before his bloodshot eyes . . . sound lashed at his brain-cells like unleashed demons of devastation.

He tried to gain his feet—and was powerless! His lips opened—and no sound came forth. A pinpoint of darkness whirled from the maelstrom of flame before his eyes, began to close in upon him like an ominous, menacing shroud. Nearer it came and nearer; with it came a coldness and a horror. Again he tried to tear the headpiece from him . . . to rise and flee . . . to scream aloud. . . .

He did none of these things. He slumped downward in the chair, limp in

the thundering darkness which had engulfed him.

WHEN he awakened, it was to find himself once again in the council hall, sprawled on the thick furs which lay beside and before the throne of the Overlord Loala. The first face he saw was that of the Venusian princess herself; she was staring down at him with pride and approbation.

He said, "What . . . what . . . ?" and tried to lift himself, but the slightest movement roused sharp needles of pain within his brain; the floor beneath him spun giddily.

Loala leaned forward, pressed something to his lips.

"Here! Drink this! It will rid you of the after-pains. You are a strong man, Steve of Emmeity. Few waken so swiftly after undergoing the Treatment."

As she had said, the amber liquid dulled the fire in his skull. Vigor returned to Steve slowly but surely; he was able to lift himself without reeling. He whispered, "Then it is over?"

"It is over, Steve. Now you are one of Us. Guards! You may retire now. The human will return to the prison by himself in due time."

Obediently the Daan warriors withdrew. Steve stared after them wonderingly.

"Then they speak the human tongue as well as yours? When first you addressed them, you spoke in the Daan language."

Loala smiled.

"And this time also, Steve."

"This time—?"

"I spoke to them," laughed Loala, "in the tongue of our mother planet, Daan. Yes."

"But—but I understood you!"

"Of course. It was for that you took the Treatment. Search your mind,

Steve of Emmeity, and tell me—what month is it upon our native world?"

"Why—why, Kraama, of course—" replied Steve instantly—and stopped with his mouth an O of astonishment.

"I—I *knew*!"

"That," smiled Loala, "and many other things. Where are the nearest Daan fortresses, Steve, in the event that you should ever need help quickly?"

"Kleevlun," responded Steve promptly, "Slooie, Yanaplis, Davun—Yes, Princess! That, too, I know! And a—host of other things! The number of our forces . . . the legends of our people . . . the history of our great race . . . *your* race. . ."

He stopped, corrected himself in confusion. It was a hopeless jumble in his mind. His thoughts, his knowledge, his instincts, were still those of Stephen Duane, Earthman—but superimposed upon these were the thoughts, the knowledge, the instincts of another, a second Stephen Duane—a Brother in the fellowship of Daan!

The old Steve Duane had looked upon the woman Loala and found her seductive, alluring. The new Duane, seeing her, was blinded by the radiance of her overwhelming beauty! Gone were any last, small, lingering doubts as to the attractiveness of her pallid skin, her bleached-silver hair, her grey-shadowed eyes. To him, these physical traits were now tokens of perfection. Her white flesh roused a crying hunger within him . . . he felt an impulse to bury his hands in her silver hair and feel its fineness strain through his fingers like a web of molten glory . . . the quickening beat of his pulse was like a metronome pacing the tempo of his heart's breath.

THE Lady Loala, reading this in his eyes, smiled and stirred with lan-

guorous assurance. She whispered softly:

"You found me attractive before, Steve. And now—?"

But deep within Stephen Duane stirred a memory . . . the haunting recollection of *another* woman, one whose hair was a cascade of flowing gold, whose body was pearl and ivory. A girl whose lips had warmed beneath his own. And—Treatment be damned—*this* Duane was still the dominant of Steve's new schizophrenic character.

And this, realized Duane suddenly, was to his advantage! Never, now, would the Daans dream that he was other than that which he pretended to be: a convert to their ideology. He was in possession of their lore, their secrets—and still free agent to do as he willed!

How this might be, he could not say. Perhaps because the machine which gave the Treatment was set to establish dominion over barbarians of lesser mind . . . perhaps because his Twentieth Century brain was somehow differently formed than the evolved brains of men fifteen hundred years removed. But the Treatment, somehow, had failed its complete purpose.

With this realization came the second realization that never must he allow the Daans to suspect his freedom of mind. They considered him now one of Them; he must foster this belief. So—

He stirred forward as though impelled by a restless urgency almost beyond endurance. And, "Need I tell you, O Loala!" he murmured vibrantly. "Need my lips speak—?"

And Loala was, indeed, a true daughter of her sex. Pursuer herself but a short while ago, now she took delight in becoming the pursued, and her withdrawal was purely feminine.

"Not now, Steve," she warded him off, "but later—when you have com-

pleted your task. Yes, I am convinced. But be swift, my human, and return to me. And perform your task faithfully and well, remembering the fate which befalls those Brothers who fail."

"Fate?" repeated Steve.

"Yes. This must be told you that you will ever act for the greater glory of the Daans. While you were in the Treatment cabinet, your brain passages were impressed with the knowledge of our people—up to certain limits. Someday I may attempt to explain how the cabinet works; at present your human brain would not comprehend.

"But at the same time, another thing was done. Upon a metal cylinder was impressed a 'nerve image' of your brain, a pattern of waves and impulses which—like your fingerprints—is peculiar to you alone of all humans on Earth.

"This nerve image has been placed in our laboratory vaults. It is our protection against treason or disloyalty, against greed, cunning or too-great ambition. Beware lest you should be found guilty of any of these crimes, for the metal cylinder is electrically sympathetic to your own brain. If it becomes necessary, the brain-pattern can be destroyed—and when it is destroyed, *you die instantly!*"

## CHAPTER X

### Brother Rodrik

"SO?" queried Chuck Lafferty.

"So then—" continued Steve—"she told me that the first time I speak out of turn, my recording gets burned up. And there I go—*boom!* Out like a light! A swell mess I made of things! Try to outsmart the Daans and get caught in their booby-trap!"

He kicked savagely at a hapless clod. He had reason to worry, had Stephen



Duane. Three days had passed since his departure from the Daan fortress. Now every step, each passing second, brought him and his companions nearer Fautnox, and he had not yet puzzled a way out of his difficulties.

Chuck said, "It's distinctly ungood, pal. You're in a lock. If the Daans ever catch on that you're really one of the Slumberers—*bing!* And I'm all alone in this wacky world with that skunk, von Rath. But—but how about this here now Rodrik person? Where does *he* fit into the picture?"

"He," growled Steve bitterly, "is one of my brand-new 'Brothers.' At the last moment, just as we were leaving Sinnaty, I was advised that he was to accompany us on our journey. I'm not certain, but I suspect that was the doing of Malgro. Remember him? The Daan councillor who wanted to lop off our heads without giving us a chance to explain ourselves?"

Chuck groaned. "Then Malgro don't exactly trust you, eh?"

"Possibly not. Or maybe it's just routine. Like the Nazis of our day, the Daans don't even trust their own. They set spies to spy on their spies. But—shhh! Here's Rodrik now!"

The Mish-kinite wore a worried look as he approached. He glanced at Lafferty hesitantly, said to Steve:

"If we could speak privately—?"

Chuck snorted, "Don't mind me. I'm just one of the Jones boys—" but Duane silenced him.

"It's all right, Chuck. Run along." Then, as Chuck moved forward to where Beth led the little group, "Well?" he asked, "What's the matter, Rodrik?"

"I do not like this," complained the traitor. "There is something strange going on here, Brother. These Women of your equipage—do you trust them?"

"Completely. Why?"

"Well—we are supposed to be a scouting party," said the other, "seeking the hidden shrine of Fautnox. But we make no effort to conceal ourselves from others. Thrice have we encountered armed groups of warriors, but never once did you ask them the whereabouts of the place we seek. And we press forward through these leafy jungles surely, certainly, almost as if we had some destination in view."

Steve laughed curtly.

"Oh, is that all? We do."

"We . . . do?"

"Of course. Our destination is—Fautnox."

Rodrik gestured impatiently.

"Yes. That I know, Brother. But according to such rumors as we have heard, Fautnox lies more to the east of the road we travel—"

It was the "Brother" that did it. For three days now Steve Duane had been pondering which course it would be best to pursue as regarded Rodrik of Mish-kin. Now, hearing again that fraternal salutation on the other's lips, he decided.

For the sake of the dream he had within him, he could endure labor and pain, trouble and hardship. But one thing he could not stand was hearing himself coupled in traitorous Brotherhood with such humans as this standing before him. He grinned, and dropped his pretenses.

"That," he said grimly, "is what you think."

"Yes. Of course. Then should we not change—" In that instant, Rodrik understood. His eyes opened wide. "You mean—you *know* where Fautnox is?"

"That's it, Brother Rat," said Steve.

"Then—then why did you not tell Malgro?" demanded the other man. "Why did you pretend ignorance . . . let them send us from Sinnaty . . ."

"Because," gritted Duane, "we *came* from Fautnox, and wanted to get back there! And if I'm not mistaken, it's just beyond that rise—Hold it, Rodrik! You're not going back to Sinary! You're staying here with us! Jain! Seize this man; bind him. He is our prisoner!"

In vain the "Brother of the Daans" fought to escape. Seconds later he was securely trussed and, flanked on either side by watchful warriors, being prodded up the last hill. A few more yards, and the little group topped the crest, stood looking down into the secluded valley which was their refuge.

**B**UT the forest-hid fortress had changed much in the days which had elapsed since they left it. Before, it had been a desolate-seeming barracks, surrounded by the crumbling shell of a wall; its denizens had dwelt invisibly underground. But now the entire clearing was athrong with humans. The Mother Maatha and Jon, leader of the Wild Ones, had made good their promises; they had summoned to this gathering place all over whom their words held any persuasion. The result was a motley array of humankind.

Here, close beside a buttress of the old wall, were pitched a huddle of dingy, goatskin tents: the shelters of the Wild Ones. Elsewhere about the courtyard where once Men and Women had met in bloody combat had been erected crude, wooden *hoams* for the Women of visiting Clans. Their number was great as could be seen even from this distance by the differences in their tribal trappings.

Strangest sight of all to the eyes of Beth and Jain, the three fighting-women, was that of Wild Ones and Clanswomen seated side by side before scattered campfires . . . laboring side by side on still other dwelling-places

for the expected reinforcements . . . toiling side by side at the forges, in the fields.

Chuck said, "Good golly, look at 'em! Cozyin' up like bugs in a rug, Steve. Boy! They took to the New Order like a duck to water!"

Even Rodrik stopped muttering threats as he stared incredulously at the sight before them. He said, "But this is madness! Women and Wild Ones joined together, working in harmony! Even in my tribe—"

And the priestess Beth raised troubled eyes to Steve. "Is this," she asked, "is this what you had planned for, O my mate?"

Steve answered quietly, "Yes, Beth. This is the way it shall henceforth be. This is how it was in the old days."

And he led the way down the hill to the encampment. Sentries glimpsed them from afar, challenges turned to cries of joyous recognition. "*The Slumberers! The Slumberers are returned!*" And center of a spontaneous exhibition that woke the very hills to jubilee, the voyagers shouldered their way through roaring hosts to seek the *hoam* of the Mother.

They found her seated in council with not only Jon but the leaders of a dozen other tribes of Wild Ones as well as the Mothers of as many neighboring Clans. She rose, moved forward to greet them, her wise old eyes soft with tears of happiness.

"You have returned. Now, thanks be unto great Jarg, who has given you back to us! See, I step down from the rostrum, O Dwain! The council is thine. Tell us what you have learned, and what must next be done."

"First," said Steve, "suppose you tell us the number now gathered at Fautnox, O Mother. It must be great."

"They are as the sands of the sea," said the Mother proudly. "Of Women

there are fourteen Clans . . . Of Wild Ones a dozen tribes. And more pour in from every direction daily. Already our poor resources are overtaxed; we have sent bands of hunters into the woods to find us meat, and Workers slave in the fields night and day that all mouths may be fed."

"And the number of actual fighting men and women?"

"Hear, O Dwain, and be staggered!" said the matriarch triumphantly. "For surely this is the greatest army ever to be assembled! We number two thousand, eight hundred and four strong warriors—all armed and ready to strike for freedom!"

VON RATH gasped aloud. "Two thousand—!"

Steve interrupted him swiftly before his disappointment could communicate itself to the humans now gazing at him with such radiant pride mirrored in their faces. He knew how the German felt. After their plans, their high hopes, to be given this handful of soldiers . . . this pitiful little force with which to undertake the redemption of a world. . . .

But—was it such a pitiful little force, after all? Of all who heard the number, only he and von Rath and Lafferty were negatively stirred. The priestess Beth's red lips were agape with wonder, the eyes of Jain had lighted with grim joy, and even Rodrik—who knew the ways of the Daans—was hushed with something akin to awe.

And Duane, searching his own brain—the refurbished brain supplied him by the Treatment—realized suddenly that he was guilty, as were his time-exile comrades, of anachronistic thinking. In the era whence they came, such an army would be a mere nothing . . . a suicide squad with which to withstand an enemy's advance for a day, an hour

. . . but in *this* day it was a force to be reckoned with. The Daans themselves held Sinnaty with less than five thousand souls, while some of their less important citadels were manned by detachments numbering only in the hundreds. . . .

"You have done well, O Mother!" he said. "We have now the strength to —" He stopped suddenly, turned — "Von Rath!" he said.

"Yes, Duane?"

"Take Rodrik away from here, will you? We don't want him to hear our plans. And—guard him well! I'll tell you what we decide later."

"*Sehr gut!*" The German took Rodrik's arm, propelled him roughly from the chamber. Buck glared after them disdainfully.

"There goes a sweet pair," he groused. "I wouldn't trust either of 'em any farther'n I could throw a cow by the tail! Steve, if you want Rodrik guarded, why didn't you ask me to —"

"Because," explained Steve, "I wanted you here, in the first place. And in the second place, because I'm not any too sure of von Rath myself. But, now —" And he turned to his audience—"as to our next step—"

"Tell us, O Dwain," said one of the gathered Mothers. "We are yours to command. Aye, and more are yet to come, for word of your Wakening spreads throughout Tizathy like flames in the forest. Do we wait for still further strength, or—"

"We do not!" declared Steve boldly. "We change our gathering-place to a larger and more central city. One which will amply feed and house our ever-increasing numbers."

"And that place, O Dwain?"

"The nearest," said Steve, "of the strongholds now held by the Daans. Send messengers to spread the word

and bid the fighters prepare. Tomorrow, at dawn, we march on Loovill!"

**D**AWN . . . and the first thin silver of gold limning the crests of the eastward hills. Dawn . . . and two men crouching in a field of waving grain.

All night long these two had led their troops across broken, weed-strewn ground which had once been verdant farmland, down cracked *creet* roads which had been highways, over hills and streams and mounds of tumbled masonry which marked forgotten homesites. Now they lay within sight of the city, and the time was ripe for action.

Chuck said, "You sure we ain't bitin' off more than we can chew, Steve?"

"I think not. This much is certain: if we can't take Louisville, our whole dream is blasted. There are only four hundred Daans in the entire city."

"Yeah, I know. But that gun they have—"

"Is deadly. Make no mistake about that. It expels some sort of radiation which will either kill or stun, depending on the way its dial is set. But we have the advantage of surprise."

"How about the Daans? Don't they have some sort of communication, like radio or telephone? Any race as smart as theirs—"

"They have. An instrument they call the 'telaudio.' But our objective is to take this city and set up a fortress here before outside help can arrive. Jain—all are ready?"

"Ready and eager, O Dwain!" answered she who was in general command of the allied fighters.

"Then—" Steve drew a deep breath—"let's go!"

Thus simply, without fanfare or threat, declaration or parley, was launched the first reprisal blow of long-

time captive humankind against its extraterrestrial oppressors.

Like a wave rose the earthlings from their places of concealment to hurl themselves forward into the city. It did not matter that they had marched thirty-five miles during the night; these were strong women and stronger men, their sinews were hardened in the never-ending struggle against nature.

Their hearts were strong, too, and their voices. As they charged the Daans' citadel they roared, and their cries were a paean of deliverance.

"For the Slumberers—*strike! Strike for the Slumberers!*"

What happened during the next hour was all chaos and confusion. At the head of the advancing Tuckians, Steve had neither the perspective from which to view the battle in its entirety nor the time to analyze its tide. He was swept away in a torrent of action . . . of blow-dealing and blow-fending . . . of movement and halt . . . life and death . . . which was beyond the scope of any single mote's comprehension.

All he did realize was that the attack achieved its purpose in taking the Daans completely by surprise. Years of rulership had made them contemptuous of their human enemies; they paid now, dearly, for this contempt. Before an alarm was sounded, the advancing allies had swept into the heart of the city; before sleep-befogged soldiers could man the ramparts of the central fortress, those ramparts were aswarm with clambering human warriors.

**T**HE weapon of the Daans was deadly. Its flaming ray withered whole ranks of the attackers, mowing them down with the grim, mathematical precision of a husbandman's scythe—but this slaughter seemed only

to increase the fury of those who remained. Where a Wild One dropped, stricken lifeless before ever he hit the ground, there was a warrior Woman to seize the sword from his falling hand . . . and fill his place in the ranks. Where Women tumbled in grotesque heaps, there were Workers to hurdle their bodies and plunge on . . . ever on!

And when a Daan fell, there was a Daan's ray-weapon for his nearest foe. Thus the battle, which was one of science against sheer brute power in its early stages, shifted to one of science against science. It did not matter that the earthlings could not understand the weapons with which they fought. They could sight, and aim, and press a grip—and after each such deed there was one less foe to overcome.

By what miracle Steve Duane came through that battle unscathed, he could never afterward say. Comrades fell before and behind him, on either side of him; their places were taken by still others who joyously fought and happily died with the battlecry frozen on their lips. But somehow he won through, and it was he who, at the end, accepted the capitulation of a dwindling handful of Daans hopelessly trapped, violently defeated, in the innermost chambers of their citadel.

This stricken remainder Jain would have ordered put to the sword but for Steve's refusal.

"No!" he commanded. "They have surrendered; we have their weapons. That is enough."

"But these are the Daans, O Slumberer," protested one Clansmother, "who have annually levied tribute on our people, despoiled our villages, seized our crops, chosen the strongest of our men and women and transported them to slave miserably in the stinking swamps of their native planet—"

"Nevertheless," avowed Steve, "there shall be no more slaughter. We will hold these prisoners as hostages—Yes, Chuck? What is it?"

Lafferty had burst through the mob excitedly; now he clutched his friend's arm. "There's one guy around here *is* goin' to be murdered—if I have to take him out somewhere and do it myself. The dirty, connivin' scoundrel—"

"Who?" demanded Steve. "What are you talking about?"

"Von Rath!" screamed Chuck. "That's who! Steve, I warned you not to trust him. The dirty Nazi rat has *murdered* you, just as sure as if he stuck a knife in your back—"

A quick pang of fear coursed through Stephen Duane's arteries. Even as his suddenly-dry lips framed the question, he thought he knew its answer. He said harshly, "What—what did he do?"

"Do?" howled Lafferty. "Drag him out here, Beth, so we can see him! I'll tell you what he done! He set Rodrik free! And Rodrik's on his way back to Sinnaty, hell-on-fire, to tell them that *you're* one of the Slumberers—so they can destroy you by remote control!"

## CHAPTER XI

### "A Daniel Come to Judgment"

SHORT moments ago Stephen Duane had been drinking deep of the heady wine of victory, basking in the radiant sunlight of renaissance hope. Now a cold shadow overwhelmed that sunlight; the savor of triumph soured on his lips. He turned slowly to the man standing defiantly captive between Beth and Jon.

"Is this true, von Rath?"

The Nazi met his gaze with belligerent hauteur.

"It is true, Stephen Duane."

"But why? Why did you do it? We were enemies once, I know. But we formed a pact of friendship . . . a promise of mutual assistance—"

"Pacts! Promises!" sneered von Rath. "What are these but empty words? Eric von Rath is no fool, *mein Leutnant*. He knows when a cause is doomed. And if ever a rebellion was foredestined to failure, this one is. Could any but a foolish, vain-glorious Yankee expect *this* motley, undisciplined army—" His eyes swept the rebel host derisively—"to overcome the magnificent science of the Overlords?"

"*Nein!* It is no victory you have won here today, but a single minor skirmish of a hopeless rebellion.

Surely, the Daans, even before they surrendered, sent a message to the Sinnaty garrison. Soon will come—perhaps even now it is on the way—an avenging host to wipe out this pitiful handful of upstarts.

"I, Eric von Rath, am a realist. I acknowledge a master race when I see one. I acknowledge the Overlords as masters of Earth. That is why I liberated Rodrik. That is why, when the Daans retake this place, I shall win a place high in their favor."

Lafferty grated, "Not you, weasel! When the Daans come—if they come—you ain't going to be here to see them. Because—" And he took a swift stride forward, an already crimson blade balanced judicially in his hand.





Louisville became a hell of battle

But Duane stopped him. "No, Chuck!" he ordered.

Chuck swiveled, his eyebrows twin parentheses of astonishment. "*What!* You mean to say that even *now*, after what he's done, you ain't going to—"

"I *am* going to," pledged Steve tautly, "but I myself; no one for me. Von Rath is mine. I shall take care of him personally—when I have time to do so. But now—" He swung to the warrior captain—"Jain, your forage sack, quickly! There is not a moment to waste."

The Mother Maatha asked anxiously, "What are you going to do, O Dwain?"

"I'm going after Rodrik. He has no more than a couple of hours start, and Sinnaty is a long way from here. If I'm lucky, I may be able to head him off before he can reach the Daans and spill the beans."

The Priestess Beth stepped forward, eyes lighting.

"So be it, O my mate! With the speed of the woodland hart we shall pursue him."

"Not we, Beth," corrected Duane. "You're not going. This is my job; one I must do alone. You are needed here. Stay with Chuck and help him consolidate this position, that we may use Loovil as a rallying place for our ever-growing forces."

"But," cried Beth, "it is not fitting that a Woman should desert her mate in hour of peril. The way is long, and the forest dark and treacherous—"

"One," interrupted Stephen Duane, "can travel faster than two. And now every moment is precious."

He took from Jain the knapsack she had slipped from her own shoulders; the forage bag of the woodland women which contained salt and meal, *taters* and dried meat, tinder . . . all the small necessities of a hasty trek.

"Guard von Rath well, Chuck. I'll

be looking forward to meeting him again when I return. And now—good-bye. No, Beth! I have said you must stay here."

For the girl had followed him to the doorway. But there was no stubborn insistence in her eyes as she lifted them to his. There was, instead, something else. Something incredible. A softness Stephen Duane had thought never to find mirrored in the eyes of a woman such as this, his warrior priestess.

In a small and trembling voice she whispered, "I shall come no farther than this, O Dwain. But—but before you depart, can we not as man and woman once more perform the touching-of-mouths you taught me?"

And the nearness of her warmed him for the perilous journey ahead.

STEPHEN DUANE had hoped to catch Rodrik of Mish-kin before that traitorous Brother of the Daans reached his Sinnaty goal. He had vowed to press forward at forced speed, halting no oftener than was absolutely necessary. But one thing he had failed to take into account was the fact that the urgency spurring Rodrik was as great as that which goaded himself. Rodrik knew vengeful swords would pursue him. He knew his life was forfeit should he be apprehended before he attained the sanctuary of the Daan citadel. So fear lent him a speed commensurate with Steve's determination, and because he was a strong man, woodland-trained, he maintained his precious advantage over his pursuer.

So closely did Duane press him that once, in the coolness of the dawn, he found a pallet of leaves still warm where Rodrik had rested briefly during the night. Again he found upon the roadway both used tattered shreds of a still-hot carcass; a rabbit Rodrik had killed and eaten raw, not daring to take



time to cook his meal.

But it was not until Steve passed half through the deserted village of Covtun and saw lifting before him the shimmering arch of the Sinnaty bridge that he actually glimpsed his quarry. Then, though his legs had been leaden with exhaustion, he spurred himself to one last desperate effort and almost closed the gap between himself and the fleeing Rodrik.

But the Mishkinite, whose flight had been that of a frightened Janus,\* turned and saw him—and he, too, whipped a final reserve of energy from his flagging body.

Thus it was that before Steve could draw within bowshot of his betrayer, Rodrik had screamed piteous appeal and won himself the protection of a Daan patrol. These same Venusians spotted Duane, waited for him, and took him into custody.

Their leader growled curt challenge to both humans.

"What is the meaning of this? Know you not it is forbidden armed humans shall approach our citadel? Death is the penalty for such folly."

But Rodrik bleated, "I flee in peril of my life, O masters. This man pursues me. I am Rodrik of Mish-kin, a Brother of the Daans."

And when piscine eyes narrowed upon Duane he was forced to adopt the same shibboleth. "I, too, claim sanctuary," he panted heavily. "I am Steve of Emmeity. I, too, am a Brother of the Daans."

The Daan captain glared at them malevolently.

"Methinks the Daans," he complained, "have all too many human Brothers. But—" He shrugged—

\* Janus: Roman god with two faces, each looking in a different direction. After this god is named our month of "January", which looks back at the old year, forward to the new one.—Ed.

"you have claimed the right of judgment. I shall take you to one in command."

Steve clutched at a straw of hope. There was one Venusian who might be expected to proffer him a certain favoritism. "Take us to the Lady Loala, O Captain!" he demanded.

And in the same instant Rodrik of Mish-kin cried, "Convey us to Malgro of the Council!"

**B**UT the Daan chieftain silenced them both with a gesture of his crystalline weapon. "Silence. Pangru of Daan heeds not the advice of earthling scum. You shall plead your cases before Okuno, Overlord of all human disputes and Chief Executioner."

Thus a few minutes later the two earthmen, pursued and pursuer, were herded to the judgment chamber over which presided the Overlord Okuno.

It did not lessen Steve Duane's gloom to discover that Okuno was the less tyrannical Overlord who had interceded in his behalf when first he had been taken captive by the Daans. On that occasion he had been accused of no crime greater than that of wandering without a travel certificate. This time the accusation hurled against him would be that of treason. He had been warned of, and knew full well, the punishment he must expect: destruction of the cylinder on which was engraved an electrical transcription of his brain pattern. And with this—sudden death to himself.

Nor was the accusation long in coming. Rodrik of Mish-kin burst into speech the moment they entered the room.

"Hail, O Master!" he cried. "May the Daan empire reign forever!"

"So be it," replied Okuno formally. "You may depart, Captain." With a gesture he dismissed the warrior and

his corps, then turned to the pair before him. "What is the meaning of this? I recognize you two as Brothers of the Daans. Why are you brought thus hither before me? Are you not they who were sent to seek the hidden rebel refuge of Fautnox?"

"We are, O great Okuno," clarified Rodrik.

The Overlord leaned forward. His gravely gentle face might have been a carven mask for all the emotion it displayed. But his eyes brightened with interest and his hands moved tensely. "And—found you this place?" he breathed.

"We did, O Lord of the Master Race."

"Now by Jarg and Ibrim," gasped Okuno, "false gods of the earthling race, heard you any word concerning the fabulous Slumberers?"

And—Stephen Duane took a deep breath, braced his shoulders rigidly. This was it. The showdown.

For a moment he toyed with the idea of whipping his sword from its scabbard and forever stilling Rodrik's traitorous voice. But that, he knew even as the thought flashed through his brain, was a hopeless dream. Before ever he could draw his blade, the watchful Okuno could unleash destructive lightning from his crystalline handweapon. The only thing to do was wait. Wait and hope.

Rodrik laughed, and in his laughter was a note of brazen triumph. "Aye, that we did, my Lord! And behold, he who stands before you, the human Steve of Enmeity, who by my guile I lured back to judgment in this citadel, even *he* is the one known as Dwain! *He* is one of the Slumberers!"

The Overlord stiffened, and his eyes swung, startled, to Steve. "What! A Slumberer—thou? Does this human speak the truth?"

STEVE shrugged. He could deny it, yes. But even then it would be only a matter of time before the Daans discovered the truth. And he could not see that denial was of any use now. He was doomed, anyway. Faltering or hesitation on his part would only increase the Daan's contempt for the valor of earthmen. If his last contribution to the cause of human freedom could be to instill in Venusian breasts one iota of admiration for earthling courage, and perhaps a spark of fear because a Slumberer had defied them, then he would not have died in vain.

So with a single contemptuous glance for the traitor beside him, he drew himself proudly erect and faced the Overlord boldly. Boldly he nodded his head.

"It is true, Okuno," he said. "I am one of the Slumberers, awakened after fifteen hundreds of years to lead my race to freedom."

What he expected to attend his pronouncement he did not rightly know. Outrage, certainly. Anger, possibly. Sudden death, perhaps.

But none of these followed his declaration. Instead, he had the satisfaction of seeing the almost colorless lips of the Daan pale utterly. Of seeing a proud Venusian Overlord stunned and shaken. The Executioner Okuno stared at him as one stricken. His breath rasped through his lips.

"Then—then the myths, the old legends, were true! Three *did* sleep for centuries, and—"

"And have risen now," gritted Stephen Duane, "to lead their people out of the bonds of slavery. Yes, Overlord of Earth, count the passing moments as precious gems. For each of them brings nearer the time when you and all of your race will be exiled to the stinking marshes of the planet



"I demand the right of judgment!" said Steve  
"Take us to the lady Loole."

which spawned you."

Rodrik of Mish-kin gasped.

"Blasphemy, O great Okuno! For all the Brothers of Daan I renounce this false god and the cause he espouses. Your permission, Sire, and as token of good faith, I shall destroy him, here and now."

"Nay!" Okuno's crisp command halted the traitor's movement. "You have done Daan a great service, Rodrik of Mish-kin, but now you presume too much. It is not yours to take judgment into your own hands. This man must be dealt with as all traitors to the Brotherhood. We will make an example of him. *Guard!*" He clapped his hands and warriors appeared as if by magic. "I have certain preparations to make. Bring these two humans a short time hence to the execution chamber." And he left the room.

AND so, when scarce an hour had passed, Stephen Duane found himself being led to that great vaulted chamber which was the execution room of the Daan Overlords. Okuno had not exaggerated when he said he would make an example of this occasion. "Spectacle" might have been a better word. For the amphitheatre was jammed. There were gathered into it scores of humans who, by the *camaraderie* with which they mingled with the Daan warriors, Duane rightly judged to be the assembled fellows of the Brotherhood.

He and Rodrik were motioned to a central dais, the execution dock. There they stood, side by side, Rodrik smirking triumphantly, Steve matching his grin with one of derisive bravado, while the Overlord Okuno addressed the throng.

"There stand before us," he proclaimed, "two members of the Brotherhood. One true and noble, worthy to

be acknowledged a fellow of this group. The other a scoundrel and a traitor. You are gathered to watch the justice of the Daans.

"Behold, O gathered Earthmen. Watch and tremble. To that human who worked nobly and well for our Brotherhood shall be allotted great honor. To him who proved a traitor in our midst shall be meted destruction. The cylinder of him who would have betrayed us has been placed within the destruction chamber. Behold now the vengeance of the Daans—swift, terrible, and just!"

And he lifted his arm in a sign. The Venusian guard closed a master switch. A high thin whine rose to lose itself in ultrasonic heights. Crackling waves of electricity sputtered in a metal cubicle across the room. Within that chamber a cylinder blazed into sudden, fiery oblivion. And in that moment—Rodrik of Mish-kin screamed aloud, once and horribly, and dropped dead at Stephen Duane's side!

## CHAPTER XII

### Alter Ego

STEVE'S first thought as he stood stock-still and staring with horror fascinated eyes at the crumpled figure beside him was that there had been some terrible mistake.

What he might have said or done is hard to guess. Probably nothing, for one of Duane's virtues was that of knowing when and where to keep his mouth shut. Moreover, any tendency toward speech he might have felt was thwarted when he lifted startled eyes to the Overlord Okuno to find the executioner's intense gaze unmistakably warning him to silence!

So silent he remained while his fellows of the Brotherhood filed from the

amphitheatre, and Venusian guards removed the remains of Rodrik of Mishkin.

It was then that Okuno turned to him and, obviously speaking for the benefit of those Daans who still lingered in the chamber, said, "And now, Brother Steve of Emmeity, we shall go to my privy chamber, where I shall justly reward your valor in apprehending this traitor. Come!"

But in Okuno's private room, with the door closed and locked behind them, Steve turned to the Overlord questioningly.

"And now, Okuno, what—?"

But the strangest sight of all climaxed the whole mad episode. For the purple-gowned Okuno, haughty Overlord of Daan, Chief Executor of the invading master race, had slipped to his knees—and was bowing before Steve in bumble supplication.

"Thy forgiveness, O my Lord!" he prayed, "if for a moment I caused thee trepidation or alarm. It was the only means whereby I could beguile the cunning Rodrik into silence until his lips could be sealed forever."

Steve gasped, "Then *those* were the preparations you made! You substituted his brain-pattern cylinder for mine?"

"Even so, O mighty Slumberer."

"And—" It was all beginning to make sense now—"though a Daan, you are on our side?"

Okuno's head lifted proudly. "At thy side, aye, Master! And a humble follower of the Slumberers. But no Daan am I. I am an earthman, even as thyself."

"You are—*what!*" Steve stared at the man in stunned bewilderment. Then, impatiently, "Get up, man! We are humans together. No earthman needs bow before another. Get up and tell me what this is all about!"

SO OKUNO spoke, and what he told Steve was the most heartening news Duane had heard since his wakening in this strange world of slave humans.

"I am an earthman," repeated Okuno proudly. "My real name is Wiam. Wiam of Kleevlun. The true Okuno lives no more. He made the error which, praise Jarg, many sons of the marsh planet have made: that of riding alone through human settlements too arrogantly and too often. His last such outing cost him his life. The worms have long since stripped his carcass. But this the Daans know not. For an Okuno set forth upon a journey, and an Okuno returned. Nor does any Venusian suspect I am not the true Okuno."

"But," stammered Stephen Duane, "your hair . . . your eyes . . . the webbing between your fingers . . ."

"Are all," smiled Okuno, "artificial. I know, O Slumberer, that thou who wakened in a matriarch's camp have cause to believe all humans are crude and uncultured. But, believe me, this is not so. We number amongst us a handful who remember somewhat of the skill and artifice of the Ancient Ones. The art of masquerade we know and practice mightily.

"Rejoice to learn, O Slumberer, that I am not the only earthman who treads the soil of Terra in the guise of a Venusian. Throughout broad Tizathy there are scores, hundreds, like myself. Altered earthmen with bleached hair and chemically treated pupils, artificial webbing secured to their phalanges, who have wormed their way into the confidence of the so-called 'master race,' and but wait for that moment to come when earthmen may strike for their lost liberty.

"Changelings like myself are Daan guards, captains of Daan troops, space

navigators, and even as I, Councilors of Daan citadels. It is a vast and secret movement we have prepared for generations, awaiting only—a leader. And now—" The masquerader's pale eyes gleamed with fanatic zeal—"the leaders have come! The legend has been fulfilled, and the Slumberers have awakened!"

Stephen Duane felt a vast resurgence well within him. There had been moments when, despite his own courage and determination, his spirit had shrunk appalled before the magnitude of the task confronting him, so helpless had been those upon whom he had been forced to depend for aid, so engulfed in barbarism and superstition. But here were men of richer stuff conceived. Men not only of purpose, but of wit and wisdom. Men who had wormed their way into the very heart of the invaders' organization.

"Great guns, Okuno!" he cried excitedly. "This is the best news yet! A counteroffensive set up within the Daan organization! More than I dared dream of!"

"We stand ready," said Okuno simply, "to do your bidding. What are your orders, O Duane?"

Stephen Duane said feverishly, "I don't exactly know—yet. We'll have to call a council of war. We have already struck the first blow against the enemy, you know. Three days ago our forces occupied Loovil!"

Okuno lifted a trembling hand. His voice shook.

"Pardon, O Duane. But do you mean to say you have not heard of the retaking of Loovil?"

"**L**OOVIL retaken!" choked Steve. "You mean—?"

Okuno nodded slowly. "Yes, O Slumberer. Before that garrison fell, its commander got off a message to this

headquarters. Even as you pursued Rodrik of Mish-kin hither, a punitive expedition flew from Sinnaty to Loovil. Your companions, though they defended the Tucki fortress bravely, were unable to match the superior might of the well-armed Daan fighting craft. Loovil is again a Daan outpost."

Steve Duane licked suddenly parched lips. "And—" he faltered—"and those who defended the garrison? They were—destroyed?"

Okuno nodded somberly. "Many were slain in the battle. Those who died so, swiftly and nobly, were fortunate. To the others has been meted a punishment more dreadful than clean and sudden death. By rockets they have been transferred to the planet of Daan, there to waste away the wretched remaining hours of their lives slaving in the Venusian swamps."

**I**T WAS revelatory, though at the time it did not occur to Duane, that his first tense query should have coupled with the name of a friend held dear for years that of a maid he had known scarce a fortnight.

Eyes clouded with anxiety, he gripped Okuno's arm in fingers of steel.

"The priestess Beth?" he cried. "And my fellow Slumberer, the one known as Chuck? Where are they? Were they among those—?"

He dared not say the word, dared not think of Lafferty's laughing vigor stilled by the Daan's ray-weapons, nor the dust-gold vibrancy of Beth charred and blackened by that weapon's spiteful flame.

But Okuno said, "Let us see," and moved to a cabinet upon one wall of his private chamber, drew therefrom a list of the exiled earthlings. "These are they," he told Steve, "who survived the battle and have been exiled to Daan. You will find here—"

Steve had already snatched the sheets, was scanning them eagerly. The listing of those slaughtered was like a series of sword thrusts in his heart. Brave Jain had fallen, and Mairlee, Mother of the Lextun Clan; Ralf, chieftain of a tribe of Wild Ones from Clina territory, and Alis, his new-found mate; hosts of others had died defending the all too briefly held salient.

But on another list, naming those who had survived the conflict only to be transported to Earth's evil sister planet, he found those names for which he sought most eagerly. Those of Beth and the Mother Maatha and a male who designated himself as "Shuk of Bruklin."

On still a third sheet, Steve found a name which brought a snarl of anger to his lips. That name was Ay-rik. To it was appended a strange curlique unfamiliar to Steve. Guessing at its meaning, a sudden fear awakened within him. He turned to his friend.

"This Ay-rik—what means that symbol after his name?"

Okuno glanced and shrugged. "That means he was wounded but will survive. But what troubles you, my Lord?"

"PLENTY!" gritted Steve. "It's bad enough we've lost Loovil; that some of my friends are dead and others captive. But this—" He tapped the sheet—"Eric von Rath being alive is the worst thing which could have happened to us. He is that Slumberer whom the legends tell is evil from the core. He betrayed me once, and will do it again if he gets the chance. So long as he lives neither you nor I nor any of our comrades is safe, Okuno."

The masquerader stared at him haggardly. "I see what you mean, O Duane. Let him but report that you

are one of the Slumberers and then not only will you be apprehended, but investigation will disclose that I aided you by exchanging the cylinders—"

"—and there," ground Steve curtly, "goes our whole plan before it gets well under way. Okuno, there is only one thing to do. I must somehow get to Venus."

Okuno nodded slowly. "Yes, that is so. Much more can you do there than here. Not only can you liberate our fellows in exile, and silence the tongue of this treacherous Ay-rik, but there you can perchance accomplish that which is vitally essential if ever earthmen are to reestablish control of their own planet."

"And that is—?" demanded Steve.

"Find a way," Okuno told him, "of immobilizing the Daan spacefleet. Time and again have there been opportunities for our organization to strike a blow at the Overlords' mastery . . . and this was even before we could count on the assistance of the Women and Wild Ones you have converted to our cause. But never have we dared take that last important step, for we have realized that whatever small successes might crown our uprising at the beginning would be nullified as soon as the Daans' mighty armada of space-vessels could hurtle the distance between their planet and ours.

"They garrison here but a scattered handful of space-craft. These it is well within our power to capture and subdue, the more so because there is not one of these vessels but numbers amongst its crew masqueraders like myself.

"But on Daan is cradled the full majesty of the Venusian space navy. Somehow this fleet must be crippled, so it cannot be turned against us until we have time to consolidate our positions. This, O Slumberer, is the major im-

portant task you can accomplish for us on Daan. You have powers greater than those allotted humble, commonplace mortals, O Duane. Can your powers encompass this deed?"

Steve said grimly, "I don't know, Okuno. But this much is certain: I must go to Daan, and while there, do what I can. Meanwhile, can it be arranged for me to visit the other planet?"

"Can and will, O Wise One. A ship leaves Sinnaty on the morrow for Daan. Tonight, our craftsmen will perform upon you the artistry which altered my lineaments. Meanwhile, false credentials will be forged. You will go to Daan as the noble Captain Huumo, secure beneath the seal and sanctuary of a Council messenger."

"Huumo?" frowned Steve. "But is there now a Daan captain named Huumo? Won't he—?"

Okuno smiled grimly. "When you leave in the morning," he promised, "there *will have been* another Huumo."

"And when I get to Daan—?"

"Then," said Okuno simply, "may the gods of 'Kota guide you. You must act for yourself, and upon your deeds may rest the hopes of a thousand generations. But fear not. Even on Daan you will find allies in the highest and most unexpected places."

"Mark well this interchange, O Slumberer. Should one say to you, 'Have you kinsmen on distant Terra?', answer that questioner, 'Aye, I have many brothers.' And if he then says, 'The brave never lack for brethren', you will know you have found a friend and ally. And now—" Okuno bestirred himself brusquely—"already have we lingered too long together in this room. Let us separate and meet again in the dark hours of night, that the change may be wrought in you."

He spoke no more.

SO THEY parted to meet again when midnight darkened the corridors of Nedlunplaza. And this time Steve, stripped to the buff, placed himself at the disposition of those disguise artists who had altered Okuno and others.

They worked swiftly and effectively. A chemical rinse bleached his tawny hair to Venusian silver. Brief exposure to the radiance of a floodlamp dulled the healthy color of his flesh, paling it to the more sallow hue of the Daans. Then swift technicians went to work on his hands and feet and face. With a gummy, flesh-colored plastic they lengthened the membranes between his digits, simulating the vestigial webbing of the squamous Venusians. With paddings here, and subcutaneous injections of a waxy substance elsewhere, the make-up artists subtly changed Steve's features until, staring at himself in a mirror, he could scarcely recognize his own face beneath the mask which had been superimposed upon it.

Okuno smiled his satisfaction when the job was done.

"You look more like Huumo than did Huumo himself. It will do, O Duane. Only a mother or sweetheart would recognize you beneath that mask. Here are Huumo's trappings and credentials. Henceforth, they are yours, and you are Huumo. Rest, now, a short while. For when the eastern sky lights, it will be time to board the *Oalumus*."

## CHAPTER XIII

### Spaceflight

SO CAME at last the dawn, and with its coming Okuno and Steve Duane set forth upon the last stage of the adventure which they shared together: the short journey to the spaceport.

It lay not far from the tower of Nedlunplaza—but a few minutes' trip



in the speedy monocyclular motor the Daans used as a ground vehicle—on a promontory north and east of town which, in the day whence Stephen Duane had come, had been known as Observatory Hill.

If there was any time at which Duane had doubts as to the ultimate success of his dreams, it was at that moment when first he looked upon the Daan spaceport and the gigantic metal monster cradled thereupon.

He had overestimated the courage of his own allies in this endeavor. He knew their daring and determination; knew they could be depended upon to fight the foe so long as one drop of blood remained in their veins. But now a new doubt assailed him. Perhaps he had underestimated the enemy!

It had been easy to acknowledge the scientific skill of the Daans, looking upon their plastic bridges, their single-wheeled vehicles. Yet these were feats which humans of Duane's own era might have accomplished. But this great rocketship, a towering teardrop braced in its launching tripod, tremendous jet-tubes pointed for the thrust against the bosom of earth, prow lifted proudly toward the heavens over which it was master, was at once a staggering and a humbling sight.

For this was something men had dreamed of, worked for, planned to some day build, but had found beyond their ability. Perhaps von Rath had been right. Perhaps the Venusians were a master race, rightfully Overlords of Earth. For surely . . .

Then he thought again of the city of Sinnaty, its squalid streets, its mud-encrusted hovels, and a repulsion shook him. No, culture was not a matter of superior science alone. Other things entered into it. A truly great race displayed sociological wisdom as well; knew that civilizations are built not

only on guns and swords, rockets and machines, instruments of destruction and impregnable bastions, but on the right of every slightest soul to live cleanly, warmly, comfortably, and happily at peace with his neighbors.

The science of the Daans was great, true; but it was cold and harsh, brutal. It was science for science's sake, not science harnessed for the greater welfare of living beings. This was the Daan's false ideology. There could be no peace between Venusians and earthmen until for this credo was substituted the ancient democratic principles of liberty, equality, fraternity.

Thus Stephen Duane's thoughts as he approached the huge *Oalamuo*.

THE spaceport was a beehive of activity. Hordes of human slaves were completing an all-night labor of loading the rocketship's cargo bins with Earth wares for the Venusian marts. Over these sweating humans, Daan guards cracked whips and snarled commands. Venusian officials scurried to and fro, concluding last minute preparations for the flight.

Okuno accompanied Steve to the automatic lift which bore passengers to an air-lock some sixty feet above the surface of the ground, there halted and touched the younger man's breast with his open palm in the Daan equivalent of a handshake.

"Now farewell, O Eternal One," he whispered quietly, "May the Holy Four guide and protect thy efforts. You know what must be done."

Steve nodded. "I know. I also know how to get in touch with you. You'll await word from me on the ultrawave?"

"Day and night," promised Okuno. "The movement you so gloriously started will not die a-borning. I shall see that the Revelation is spread

throughout the human territories, that gathering-places are fixed in a hundred strategic spots where Women and Wild Ones may pledge allegiance to the new order. I shall give them every assistance within my power, waiting and praying for your order to strike."

"Good!" said Steve. "And when and if we succeed in immobilizing the space-fleet on Daan, that word will flash to you. Now—" He changed his tone abruptly—"I bear and obey, O Master. The message shall be transmitted promptly."

For a uniformed Daan had approached them and was beckoning Steve to the lift. Okuno nodded. "Very good. Farewell, Captain Huumo. A safe and pleasant journey."

"Captain Huumo" saluted smartly, then ascended the lift to disappear into the ship.

He had thought he was the last passenger to board the *Oalamuo*, but just as he entered the air-lock there was a flurry of excitement on the field below. A cavalcade of monocycles, with sirens wailing stridently, came roaring across the drome. Bells clanged throughout the ship, and over its intercommunicating audio system rasped hasty commands.

"Stand by for a passenger! Locks open! Stand by!"

Space sailors scurried and grunted. There sounded the whine of the rising lift, the asthmatic wheeze of a reopening airlock. Then the belated passenger stepped into the spaceship, and . . .

Alternate waves of heat and cold swept over Stephen Duane. For he was staring squarely into the eyes of the Lady Loala—and in her answering gaze was startled recognition!

IT WAS fortunate for Stephen Duane that the take-off of the transport had been delayed, for Loala made no ef-

fort to repress her exclamation of astonishment.

"Steve of Emmeity!" she gasped. "What are you—?"

But her question was drowned in the sudden clamor of signals, a metallic voice calling over the audio system, "*All hands to posts! Prepare to lift gravs! Clear ship for lift!*"

And an officer came bustling to the duo.

"Pardon, my Lady. Pardon, my Lord. If you will come this way, please—"

And as he swept the pair before him to the hydraulic hammocks wherein passengers must recline during the initial shock of acceleration, Steve seized the opportunity to whisper to the Lady Loala, "Silence, O Mistress of Delight, I beseech thee. I am on a dangerous mission. My true identity must not be revealed."

And though the silver-haired daughter of Venus frowned, her eyes fraught with question, she said nothing more. So the two took the hammocks assigned them, strapped themselves securely therein, and a few minutes later, with an ear-splitting roar and a rushing violence which for an instant seemed to halt the very pounding of blood in their veins, the mighty jet-tubes of the *Oalamuo* exploded, catapulting their vessel outward from Earth into space.

But not for long could the curiosity of the Overlord be denied. Later, released from their hammocks, with the vessel hurtling the dark vaults of the void at a speed increasing toward the acceleration of 200,000 m.p.h. Duane later learned to be the craft's maximum velocity, the voluptuous Lady Loala turned to Steve imperiously.

"COME, Captain Huumo," she said, addressing him by the title a space sailor had used when releasing him from

his hammock. "Follow me to my quarters. I would learn more of this 'mission' which carries you to Daan."

And when they had reached the suite of rooms reserved for her use, and had closed the doors behind them: "Well?" she demanded. "What means this, Steve of Emmeity? A secret mission? And on whose behalf, pray? Was it not *I* who but recently assigned you to a mission of utmost importance?"

"It was, O my Lady," acknowledged Steve. "But that errand has already been concluded; this new duty springs from its accomplishment. On it I am sent by your companion in Council, the Overlord Okuno."

"The Chief Executioner? But why should he—Aaah!" Loala's gray-green eyes widened slightly. "Then it was you whose information warned us of the rebel uprising at Loovil, and enabled our forces to quell it? Well done, brave Steve of Emmeity! But still I do not understand. Why did you not report this directly to *me*?"

"Because," explained Steve, "upon my return to Sinnaty I was seized by guards and taken before the Chief Executioner. When I told Okuno of the dreadful secret I had learned at Loovil, he commissioned me to proceed immediately to Daan, that I might point out amongst the group recently exiled—"

"The Slumberers!" Excitement brightened Loala's eyes. "Now I understand! Then what we heard rumored was true? The Slumberers were amongst those captured at Loovil, and exiled to Daan? And you, O Steve, you can identify them?"

"I can," declared Steve boldly. Then, in a softer voice, "I can and will, O loveliest daughter of Daan."

And again, as before, Loala proved herself mistress of all things save her own truly feminine emotions. At the

tone of his voice, her features softened. Her eyes met his approvingly, and she whispered, "You have done well, Steve of Emmeity. I think the time is not far off when you shall have won that which you claim to desire. Do you—" There was a calculated allure in her sidelong glance—"Do you still find the prize worth striving for?"

"More so than ever, O Mistress of every delight," avowed Steve ardently . . . and moved a step nearer her. "Must I continue to prove myself? Surely by now I have earned—"

It was a bold gambit he offered, one which might have boomeranged against his plans. But he was gambling on the inherent coquetry of the woman Loala. His psychology was good, for, as he had expected, she withdrew before him, and her lips lifted in a smile of light amusement.

"Not so quickly, O most presuming human," she laughed archly. "There is still your important mission to be accomplished. After that, well—then perhaps we shall see . . ."

TO SAY that the following ten days, during which the spacecruiser *Oalumuo* blazed its way across thirty-odd million miles of trackless ether, were uneventful would be but to demonstrate the relativity of all things.

To the Venusian space-navigators the trip was, perhaps, one of little moment. It passed smoothly, serenely, and without untoward incident. To the passengers who spent their waking hours dining and gaming, the trip may have been unexciting. To the workmen who performed mysterious functions deep within the bowels of the ship the trip may have seemed but hours of drudgery. But to Stephen Duane the trip was ten days of nerve-tingling adventure. Excitement stirring every sense, emotion and brain-fibre.



Steve studied the controls carefully

First, there was that never-to-be-forgotten moment when, led to the Observatory Deck by a junior officer eager to win a good place in the graces of the mock Daan "nobleman," Steve looked out upon that which every imaginative human has dreamed of some day beholding: the starry firmament of space as viewed from the void itself.

Stephen Duane was stricken speechless by the majesty of this sight. Here

was no scattered handful of stars sprinkling the black emptiness like a sparse shaking of mica upon velvet. Here was a glorious backdrop of color, radiant, pulsating, gleaming with hues which shamed the efforts of the most daring rainbow. Clear of the encumbrance of Earth's blanketing atmosphere, the stars became tremendous globes burning hotly, fiercely, in the celestial vault. Flanking them on

every side, forming a webwork so closely woven as to stagger the mind with its intricateness, were millions . . . billions . . . of myriad flaming companions.

Behind the *Oalamuo* lay the blue-green orb of Earth, studded with the whirling coronet of its tiny lunar companion. Before, looming larger with each passing hour of flight, was the gleaming-white birthplace of the races of Daans. Elsewhere circling the solar giant which dominated the segment of space could be seen, methodically plodding their ordained courses, the other planets of Sol's family. Red Mars and mighty Jupiter . . . ringed Saturn and far, frozen Uranus.

IT WAS a sight to humble the proudest human. Seeing it, tiring never of its ever-changing splendor, Steve Duane renewed to himself his vow that he would do everything within his power to reclaim for an enslaved humanity the right to share in the glories of this celestial empire.

But he saw not only beauty on the trip. He studied other things more practical, as well. Under the guidance of young Thaamo, his space-mariner friend, he spent long days in traversing the *Oalamuo* from stem to stern, from control-room to jet-chambers.

Much of what he saw upon these visits he did not completely understand. That was only natural. Not in a day nor a decade had the Daans solved the secret of space-travel. It lay within the power of no single brain to instantaneously comprehend mechanisms which had taken a hundred brains to invent, a thousand hands to build.

But Stephen Duane was, or had been, a scientist—and a brilliant one. He had that type of mind which, though it necessarily ignored details at the mo-

ment unsolveable, grasped prime essentials swiftly and surely.

On the more important points Steve centered his attention. He learned that the motors propelling the ship were atomic motors, and by deft questioning learned how that long-sought power had been harnessed by the Venusians. He studied the controls so carefully that in an emergency he might have taken his seat at the pilot's studs . . . mentally blueprinted the general layout of the craft so that in days to come he might know in rude outline the sort of ship earthmen must build were they to go space-vagabonding.

He learned where the fuel was stored, and where were kept food and water supplies. He was shown—and memorized—the location of the air-conditioning system through whose viaducts refreshed, re-oxygenated atmosphere was pumped to each nook and cranny of the ship. And though the armaments of the vessel were a military secret that might not be entrusted to even a traveling dignitary, he learned the locations of the principle ray-guns, and knew the points on a Venusian man-o'-war over which one must achieve mastery in order to seize that vessel.

Thus, though others may have been bored by the trip, to Steve Duane the ten days whisked by like dry leaves fleeing before an autumn gale. And finally the journey came to an end.

On the morning of the eleventh day, when he awakened to peer through his porthole, he discovered the now-familiar spangled firmament was blotted out by a mist of writhing gray. Fog banks, impenetrably thick, engulfed the craft like a veil. The clear, sharp brilliance of open ether was left behind, and the *Oalamuo* was settling through miles of turgid white to its destination.

And when the gray evaporated, Steve looked down upon the landscape of

Earth's humid, solar sister . . . the planet Daan.

## CHAPTER XIV

### Between Two Camps

IT WAS with swiftly beating heart that Stephen Duane stepped from the *Oolumuo's* lift to the soil of the Overlords' planet. Staring about him with eyes which, despite his every effort, he could not keep from widening, he experienced again that sense of reluctant admiration for the scientific ability of those who had made themselves mankind's masters.

The spaceport outside Sinnaty had been marvel enough to earthly eyes, but it paled into insignificance before the spectacle which now presented itself. Here was no rude plain crudely hacked from a tangle of wilderness. The *Oolumuo* came to rest in but one of a hundred gigantic spacevessel cradles ranged with mathematical precision upon a tremendous, smoothly paved court studded with workshops, hangars, warehouses, machine-shops, technical offices . . . all the appurtenances and paraphernalia of a highly organized, perfectly integrated civilization.

Curiously enough, the dense cloud-banks through which the *Oolumuo* had plunged to its landing did not enswaddle this scene, nor conceal the colorfully magnificent skyline of the metropolis which surrounded the spaceport like a heaven-spanning rampart. Or perhaps that was not so curious as logical. For surely—Duane's swift reason told him—any race which could create such wonders as *these* had also long since learned how to harness and subdue the meteorological disadvantages of its native world. Plainly this island of freedom from the all-pervading Venusian fog was an

artificial one.

So lost was he in wonderment and speculation that it was not until a hand touched his shoulder that he realized he was being addressed for possibly the second or third time by the young space-officer who had been his guide and companion throughout the journey.

He spun, startled. "Oh, I—I beg your pardon, Thaamo. I was lost in dreaming. I did not realize—"

The friendly officer smiled.

"It is good to be home again, is it not, Captain Huumo? Fair Daan is a delight to the eyes after lonely years of service on our colony. Ah, well—it has been a pleasant enough journey. What are your plans now, my Captain? You will report to the Supreme Council, no doubt?"

On this point Okuno's instructions had been clear.

Duane nodded. "Yes."

"Of course. Then you will be traveling by aero to the palace. You had best make haste, Captain Huumo, ere the last flight leaves without you."

The season was warm, the air dusty-dry, but there was suddenly upon Stephen Duane's forehead a cold, dank perspiration. For, standing there with the gaze of his acquaintance upon him, he realized in that instant that there was too much he still did not know about the customs and the culture of the Daans.

He knew neither *where* the palace lay, nor what this "aereo" was by which he might reach it, nor even in which direction he should now turn with assured movement to dispel the half-suspicious curiosity of his mariner friend.

But at that moment relief came from an unexpected quarter. There sounded beside him a light tinkle of laughter and his eyes lifted to meet the taunt-

ing, gray-green eyes of the Lady Loala.

"Hasten him not, *Aarkam* Thaamo. Captain Huumo waits for me. But I am ready now. Come, Captain—" She rested a pale hand lightly upon his arm—"let us go." And gratefully Steve Duane allowed himself to be led away.

BUT a few moments later, in the seclusion of the Lady Loala's tiny, individual aereo, a small craft which Duane discovered to be somewhat similar to the two-passenger planes of his own century save that it traveled silently and effortlessly on an atomic power-beam transmitted from central control stations, rather than by any independent motor of its own, the argent Overlord mocked Steve for his recent awkward moment.

"You are a poor dissembler, Steve of Emmeity. Happy for you that you masquerade only to deceive your Earth brethren, and not the Daans. Methinks your play-acting would come to a swift end if we were those upon whom you attempted to spy, rather than the stupider humans."

Steve grinned, not half so ruefully as the Lady Loala believed, and conceded, "You are right, my princess. Deceit rests poorly upon my features, even though those features *have* been altered to make me resemble one of your own race.

"I am afraid the Lord Okuno's efforts to make me look like a true Daan were not altogether successful. The episode with Thaamo was not the first time I have come near betraying my real identity. And as for you—you penetrated my disguise the moment you laid eyes upon me."

Loala said softly, "Who should know thee better than I, Steve of Emmeity?

True, I recognized you immediately. But perhaps my eyes knew you less swiftly than my heart.

"You see, human, you please me greatly. Yes, frankly, I admit it; even I, Loala, Overlord of Sinnaty, confess I find you—interesting.

"But be of good heart. Here on Daan no other will recognize you, nor none suspect you an earthling, as none aboard the *Oalumu* questioned your race. And your secret is safe with me. Though I do not understand why Okuno found it necessary to disguise you as a Daan when he sent you on this mission."

"It was done," explained Steve hastily, "not to deceive the Daans, but the men and women of Earth amongst whom I must move and mingle freely. Were they to realize I were one of their own kind, Okuno said, they would destroy me before ever I found a chance to identify and point out the awakened Slumberers."

"I see," nodded Loala. "Well, Okuno is a wise Councillor. In his judgment I place implicit faith. Still—" Her eyes met Steve's archly—"it strikes me you have taken too seriously this mission of yours. Those were long, lazy hours aboard the *Oalumu*, my Steve. Hours we might have spent pleasantly together."

And Steve said staunchly, "There is nothing under sun and stars I should have liked better, O Vision of Loveliness. But—"

"But—?" prompted the Lady Loala.

"But the Lord Okuno has promised that if I perform this mission faithfully and well there may await me even a greater prize than that of mere acceptance into the Brotherhood. To a chosen few, he told me, is granted the privilege of full Daan citizenship, complete membership in the master race. This, O Waker of Dreams, is my

hope and my ambition. To win that coveted honor, so I may not only become your Earthly consort, but aspire to the position of your true Daan mate—"

Steve's eyes met those of the Venusian woman boldly. And this time it was her pale cheeks into which crept the faintest suspicion of color as she dropped her eyes, murmuring, "I—I fear you presume too much, Steve of Enmunity."

But the Lady Loala was not displeased. Nor did she, Steve guessed shrewdly, represent in any way an obstacle to his future plans. Loala would not betray him. Any lurking doubts which might have lingered in her bosom had been swept away by the tide of her own desires.

THUS, his true identity a secret known only to one Daan, and she one who would not reveal it, the major hurdle of Stephen Duane's great impersonation was overcome.

The Daan's Supreme Council accepted himself and his credentials for what they purported to be, strove to discern no human lineaments beneath his cleverly wrought mask, and freely granted that privilege for which Duane pleaded: the right of visiting the marsh-land slave camp wherein labored earthmen and women transported hither from Earth.

Standing before the Council, Steve experienced his first disappointment in the Daans. Under the circumstances, "disappointment" was perhaps a curious word to use, even to himself. Yet it was the only one to describe his feelings. Up to this time he had felt bitterness toward the Venusians for what they had done to Earth, had hated certain members of the master race for the brutal way they had treated their human slaves; but despite these per-

sonal animosities he had been forced to concede an intellectual approval of their skill, their culture, and above all, their superb scientific accomplishments.

Yet now he found himself standing not in such a trim, functional chamber as had been the council hall of Nedlunplaza. The palace of the Supreme Council on Daan was a sybaritic pleasure-dome which on Earth had had its counterpart centuries before Stephen Duane first drew breath.

It was in such a court as this the effete emperors of imperial France had dallied with glamorous mistresses while starving subjects fell plague-ridden in the gutters. Surrounded by such pleasures had the last Roman tyrants squandered their heritage in riotous abandon. Here was such opulence as had rotted the heart of Saladan's kingdom, Priam's, Cleopatra's, and the sea-girdling empire of Phillip.

Duane needed no textbook to tell him the history of the Daans. He knew what had happened; the evidence lay before his eyes.

The Venusians *had* been a mighty race. Only a strong and stout-hearted people could have raised from the morass of this eternally fog-veiled planet such cities and such sciences. Only daring and stalwart people could have accomplished those wonders the Daans accepted as commonplaces. Labor had played its part in this rise to superiority; labor of back and brain. Sweat of muscle and furrow of brow had created an empire. But now those who had striven so mightily were gone, leaving behind a languorous and unappreciative race to despoil the glories their forefathers had so magnificently wrought.

The present Daan empire was a spoiled, stagnant civilization. It dwelt amidst splendors created for it by van-



ished generations, reveled greedily amongst luxuries earned by the sweat of predecessor's brows. That was why slave labor was imported from Earth; to lift the burden of honest toil from hands become too proud and soft to fend for themselves.

Those Daans who maintained the scattered outposts on Earth were perhaps the last atavistic remnants of a once-great race. They, at least, could and did work for themselves; had the strength and the courage to wage incessant conflict for possession of a territory precious to the mother land.

But these members of the Supreme Council, languid, lolling, grimacing creatures who spoke in accents of exaggerated boredom, nibbled at wines and sweetmeats as they talked, pausing from time to time to fondle diaphanously-veiled females of their harem corps, were no opponents to be feared. They were, rather—Steve's eyes narrowed minutely and his jaw set—wastrels to be outwitted and overthrown.

NOW one of the Council was speaking to him, his voice a shrill simper of amusement.

"To the swamps, Captain Huumo? Of course you have our permission—if you really feel you must. But why any Daan noble would choose to go there and in this season—! Why do you wish to go?"

Steve's answer was half truthful. "Because it is said, my Lord, that at the recent battle of Loovil were taken into custody certain humans who call themselves the 'Slumberers.' The Chief Executioner, Okuno, sent me hither to find these three and return them to Earth for judgment."

"Slumberers?" drawled his questioner. "But surely that ancient myth has been exploded by now, Captain?

It is written in the Archives that when our ancestors took Earth centuries ago its people worshipped these fabulous creatures. Have they not learned by now—?"

The Lady Loala interrupted, sharply, impatiently. Glancing at her in surprise, Steve could not help but feel that she, too, had found cause for disappointment in the namby-pamby behavior of her superiors.

"Pardon, O Masters," she said, "but the Captain Huumo speaks truth. We who have lately served, *fighting* and *working*—" she stressed the verbs with delicate irony that escaped all save Steve—"on Earth are conscious of a new spirit of rebellion amongst that planet's people. A rebirth of the independence which made them bitter foes centuries ago.

"Our spies inform us that word spreads like wildfire amongst the humans that the Slumberers have awakened, and the hour to strike for human liberation is nigh. If this be true, there may again be bloody warfare on our colony."

"But our fleet, my Lady—" offered one of the Masters—"it is swift and powerful—"

"That I know," said the Lady Loala grimly, "and this I also know—that had Daan not an armada of fighting vessels as an ever-ready threat to hurl against Earth's children, by their vigor and strength, by their renascent determination for freedom they might tomorrow break the bonds of servitude in which we hold them. You may thank the waters whence our ancestors sprang, O my Lords, that we *have* this mighty fleet at our command."

"We are duly grateful, Lady Loala," yawned the first Councillor impatiently. "But since we *have* this bulwark, there is no reason to become apprehensive. Was it thus to warn us and spoil

our pleasure that you journeyed hither from Earth?"

The Lady Loala shrugged and abandoned the futile attempt to make her Masters understand. "It was, my Lord. But I see now my mission has been vain. Therefore, with your permission I shall withdraw and arrange to return to my post with the first outgoing transport."

"Very well. But wait! Did you not say it was within your territory the Slumberers are reputed to have awakened?"

"Aye, my Lord."

"Then since the first transport is not scheduled to leave for several days, would it not be well for you to accompany the Captain Huumo on his search for these—fabulous creatures?"

There was a mocking lilt to the Councillor's voice. Even Stephen Duane, who was not familiar with Daan traits and trends, read the meaning behind his words. Reminder of the responsibilities habitually shirked had wakened the Council's spite. None too subtly the Lady Loala was being punished for the temerarious violation of their languor, in thus being sent to the equatorial swamplands.

But if Loala recognized this sentence as punishment she showed it neither by word nor expression. Instead, with almost eager alacrity she said, "Very well, my Lord. Your wish is my command. It shall be as you say."

Thus Stephen Duane found himself burdened with the one companion of all Daandom whom he wanted least to take with him on his journey.

## CHAPTER XV

### Swamp Gold

AS ON the following day he and the Lady Loala neared their destina-

tion by private aereo, Steve Duane came to the conclusion that not without reason had the Daan Supreme Councillor spoken distastefully of the summer climate in this section of the planet.

Nothing in Duane's experience had prepared him for such devastating heat as that which waxed stronger and more devouring as they approached their goal. Earth of Duane's day had known its uncomfortable spots . . . the Mohave, the Sabara, the pouring-room of a steel mill, a New York night club in midsummer . . . but nowhere had heat ever been so constant, so unavoidable, so overwhelmingly depressing as here in the equatorial regions of Daan.

For one thing, the planet was some twenty-five millions of miles nearer the sun than was Earth. For another, it was enveloped in a swaddling cloak of moisture-laden atmosphere. The third and culminating blow was the terrain over which they flew: a vast and squamous marshland, jungle-thick, steamy and frothy with the scums and scents of myriad forms of torrid, aqueous life.

This combination of sights and smells and stifling heat not only weakened but sickened Steve Duane. The Lady Loala did not seem to share his discomfort completely. Apparently the pores of her dead-white skin were better adapted to this climate than were those of the Earth man. But even she was far from comfortable.

Traveling over this terrain was like tunneling in a closed sled through rifts of downy cotton, so constantly was their ship engulfed in solid layers of fog. Only at brief intervals and for briefer flashes did the interminable mist clear long enough to reveal below them the sprawling green tracery of jungle, or a black and sluggish river

winding its sultry way through a half-drowned plain.

And, traveling thus, Duane realized that the beam transmission method of Daan aircraft was not only a great accomplishment but, indeed, the only possible means of flight over a planet so humid as Daan. Only about cities and major outposts did atmosphere-clearing units offer flyers somewhat better than 0-0 visibility. Elsewhere, were it not for the narrow transmission of the atomic power setup, aereo drivers would have been forced to fly by dead reckoning at all times.

Now, however, their craft was approaching one of these cleared patches of atmosphere. The cottony blanket about them was thinning into tufted clots. And Loala, glancing at the instrument panel before her, nodded to Steve.

"This is the slave camp, Steve of Emmeity."

And deftly she guided the little ship to rest on a field which appeared beneath them.

THEY were greeted upon landing by one who identified himself as the Chief Warden of this slave camp. He was a hulking, truculent brute, more goggling of eye, more prognathous of jaw than most of the Daans. He descended upon them with belligerent slacrity, growling curt queries. But upon learning his visitors were an Overlord and a noble of high rank, his attitude underwent a swift, chameleon-like change. At once he was bowing and scraping, obsequiously servile.

"Yes, my Lady! Yes, my Lord!" he answered their queries. "The new prisoners are quartered here. Of a certainty you may interview them. I will have you shown to their pens immediately. Amarro! Hither quickly, lazy one, and guide our guests to the

sties of the Earthborn scum!"

The lieutenant who answered his summons was scarcely less prepossessing of appearance; but Stephen Duane paid him the mental compliment of acknowledging that here was one Daan, at least, with a few vestiges of dignity and compassion.

He frowned at his commander, reminded gently, "But Grudo, they are asleep. It is their hour of rest. They have but returned from long hours of hackbreaking toil in the swamps—"

"Silence, weakling!" bellowed Grudo irately. "There is no rest for slaves unto the grave. Convey our visitors where they would go instantly!"

And to Loala and Steve as the abashed Amarro shrugged and silently led the way, "This is what comes," he grumbled, "of allowing Daan warriors to visit that accursed colony, Earth. Before Amarro vacationed there, he was the best hand with the lash of all my guards; since his return he coddles our prisoners like house pets. You will forgive me if I do not accompany you? I must go now and make preparations that you may eat, drink, and be entertained when you have finished your task. May Daan live forever!"

"May Daan live forever!" repeated Steve and Loala ritually, and followed their guide to the pens wherein were herded the Earthborn prisoners.

It were folly to attempt to describe the revolting squalor of the prisoners' barracks. Grudo had not chosen wrongly when he called their quarters "sties." If anything, the word overglamorized the conditions under which the slaves were kept.

After threading his way through an intricate series of barricades and across an open area through which even Amarro walked gingerly, explaining as he did so that this entire field was groundmined with atomic bombs

against the possibility of a single prisoner's escaping, Steve's heart sickened within him to look at last upon the filthy pens into which were huddled a thousand imprisoned Earth cattle, including those who had so recently and gallantly fought beside him at the taking of Loovil.

The miasmatic odors emanating from the swamps were but part of the appalling stench which rose to offend his nostrils. Odors of death and decay, sickness and filth, stagnant waters alive with squirming life, rotten food . . . these were the conditions under which the effete Daans maintained their "mastery" over once free earthmen.

Yet what men *must* endure they somehow can. And even in this scene of degradation, somehow the exhausted prisoners contrived to sleep—until Amarro issued the order which brought the entire camp to its feet as a brazen klaxon clamored its strident signal over the barracks.

Then haggard humans, trained by lash and rack to obey the summons of that signal, came straggling from their quarters to stare in dumb bewilderment at their gaudily-raimented visitors. And it was then Amarro turned to Stephen Duane.

**P**ERHAPS it was only imagination on Duane's part, but for an instant he thought he detected in the guard's eyes a sullen glitter of disdain as Amarro muttered, "Here are those you seek, noble Lord. Fear them not. They are too weak and weary to resent your questioning."

And the Lady Loala glanced at Steve.

"Do you see them, Steve of Emmeity? See you the trio you came to identify? Those known as the Slumberers?"

Steve did not hurry his answer. He

had already seen and grievously recognized many of those he loved. Beth . . . and the Mother Maatha. Chuck Lafferty who, even in befouled exhaustion, managed to maintain a shadow of his erstwhile proud defiance. The Wild Ones' leader, Jon. Lina, warrior-captain of a Tensee Clan.

But there was one whose sight evaded him, and that one, for the nonce at least, perhaps the most important of them all. Steve turned to Amarro, frowning.

"I am not altogether sure. I saw the Slumberers but once, and then for a short time. It is not easy to recognize them under these conditions. But there is one face I have not forgotten. I see it not here now. A human tall as myself . . . with close-cropped hair of yellow, pale blue eyes, heavy jaw and thick lips . . ."

Amarro started. "What, my Lord? Say you *that* one is a Slumberer? He is not here."

"Not here?" cried Steve in swift alarm. "Then where is he?"

"He is back at our headquarters," explained the guard, "undergoing hospitalization. He was wounded when brought from Earth, and could do no work. His mind was affected so he knew not where he was, nor whom. He begins to show signs of recovery now, though—"

A swift pang of fear coursed through Stephen Duane. So far he and his comrades had been fortunate. Von Rath's amnesia was the only reason Chuck still lived and he, Duane, trod the soil of Daan freely. But if von Rath recovered, it would be but a matter of time before . . .

His voice lifted sharply, excitedly. "I must see him at once, Amarro. Take us back to headquarters immediately—"

His very excitement was his undo-

ing. For his voice carried clearly across the ground which separated him from his former comrades. At the sound of that voice one slim and dust-gold figure thrust forward suddenly, and a heart-stoppingly familiar voice cried,

"Steve! O Dwain! O Slumberer—thou hast come at last to free us!"

Then everything happened at once. Chuck Lafferty's eyes widened in belated recognition, and he moved in swifter comprehension of the evil Beth had unwittingly done; leaped to the girl's side and clamped a stifling hand over her lips.

But of the mob, only these two identified Duane with gladness or understanding. Through the rest stirred an ominous murmur which heightened instantly to screams of rage and hatred.

A mad voice cried, "Betrayer!", and

a hundred throats took up the cry.

"It is he, Dwain! The Slumberer who betrayed us!"

And with one concerted movement, like the liberation of flood-waters loosed from their dam, the prisoners surged forward, eyes burning, bare hands aquiver with hatred, to seek revenge upon the rescuer they thought a traitor to their cause!

**I**N THE immediacy of this peril it was only the swift action of the guard Amarro which saved the two visitors.

Steve Duane was stricken motionless by this catastrophic disruption of his plans. The Lady Loala was too dazed by the accusation against her favorite to defend herself. She whirled to Steve, her gray-green eyes startled.

A mad voice cried, "Betrayer!"



"What is this, Steve of Emmeity? They call you Slumberer? What means—?"

Steve answered hurriedly, "There—there must be some terrible mistake. I know not what they mean, my Lady. They confuse me with one of their false gods."

But Amarro, after one stunned glance at Steve, had sprung into action. Ray weapons seemed to leap from his harness to his hands, and in a voice of thunder he cried to the advancing throng, "Back, dogs! Back to your kennels and stop baying! That human who takes another step forward—dies!"

And before the swift menace of his gesture the small uprising trembled and fell apart. Already the privations of this camp had taken their toll upon the spirit of the earthlings. Like cowed creatures they quelled before the lone Venusian. Their babble died, and listlessly they permitted themselves to be forced back into the building which housed them.

Amarro turned to Steve with a curiously level gaze that embodied half a question.

"They hate you, Captain Huumo. It is not safe that you remain here. Perhaps we should return to headquarters."

But Steve said, "No. At the last moment I thought I recognized amongst them one of the Slumberers. Saw you that dark-haired earthman in the forefront? The one who silenced the wench who accused me? I would speak to him. Is there some place we could go for—private questioning?"

Deliberately he fingered his ray-gun while voicing the final phrase. For this, he knew, was a familiar method of "private questioning" used by the Daans in this era as it had been used by totalitarian leaders of his own.

And to both Amarro and Loala the query made sense. Loala smiled thinly, and Amarro replied, "There is such a place, my Captain. That small hut over there. But—may I remind your Lordship these slaves are valuable? We destroy them only on major provocation."

"I understand, guard," said Steve haughtily. "Now bring me the prisoner. And you, my Lady, there is something in what this guard says. Perhaps it would be safer if you retired."

And Fortune at last was tossing the breaks his way. For the Lady Loala nodded.

"Aye, Captain Huumo, that I shall do. I will await you at headquarters."

And she left.

SO, SHORT minutes later, Amarro having brought his prisoner to the shack wherein Duane waited, and having left, securing the door behind him, Steve stood at last face to face again with his friend and companion of a lifetime.

In that glad moment it did not matter that his proud trappings were stainless, while Chuck's reeked from head to foot with the prison's filth. Glee-fully Steve rushed to his chum's side, gripped him in a bear hug of brotherly affection.

"Chuck!" he cried, his voice breaking. "Chuck, you old son-of-a-gun! I was afraid we'd never meet again. But I made it, pal! I made it!"

And if some of the captives had lost their spirit under Daan treatment, Chuck Lafferty, at least, was made of sterner stuff. For his answer was typical of himself. He answered Steve with a grin sincere if weary.

"Okay," he snorted. "Okay, hud. But I'm warning you—if you kiss me you gotta marry me! Now, for God's

sake, pal, talk and talk fast. What are you doing here in them duds? And what in the name of creeping pink lizards have they done to your homely puss? You look like something that crawled off an autopsy table!"

"Better that," chuckled Steve, "than somebody who's going to. Don't look now, pal, but I'm a ranking noble of the Daans."

"You're—*what*?" Chuck's grin faded abruptly. "You mean, Steve, the bunch was right? You *have* sold us out? Gone over to their side?"

Steve stared at him long and steadily.

"Do you have to ask that, Chuck?"

And Chuck's eyes fell, then raised again slowly.

"No, I don't. I don't even know why the words come out, Steve. But that's what some of them have been saying. Beth and me and the Mother Maatha and maybe a few others, we're just about the only ones left who still believe in you."

Steve said soberly, "Loovil was that bad, Chuck?"

CHUCK nodded. "It was worse. We were just getting settled when the Daan warship came. We were powerless. I don't think there's one stone left on another in that city. And—you see what's left of our 'tremendous army' of two thousand."

"But—" He shook his head and with that gesture tried to dismiss visions of horror forever indelibly imprinted on his mind—"but there's no use talking about that now. What's next on the program? You're here to free us, ain't you? Have we got a halfway fighting chance to—?"

Steve said hotly, "I'm here not only to free *you*, but maybe to free all Earth, Chuck!"

And in swift sentences he told his

friend all that had transpired since their parting. Of Rodrik's death and the false Lord Okuno. Of his visit to the Supreme Council and the results thereof.

"And so," he concluded, "that gives you some idea of the organization we've formed. One huge enough to reclaim Earth for mankind—if we can find some way of immobilizing the Venusian spacefleet here on Daan until our forces have destroyed the invaders. But—" And he shook his head sadly—"that's the stumbling block, Chuck. I've got to find an answer to it somehow . . . but it's a tremendous problem. One hundred warships cradled at the spaceport, just waiting the word to go into action . . . and we have no arms to throw against them!"

"Lord!" he moaned bitterly, "if the legends of the Clans *had* only been true! If only we *did* have that precious secret the Women expected the Slumherers to bring from their tombs!"

"Good goddamitey!" cried Chuck. "I ain't told you?"

"Eh? What's that? Told me what?"

Chuck's eyes were wide. His words tumbled in hectic confusion from his lips.

"What I've learned since I've been here, Steve. Maybe that legend about our bringing earthmen a weapon ain't so cockeyed after all. Do you know the work they set us at here in these swamps? Reclaiming the marshes, destroying the rank vegetation that grows wild here, acres and acres of—"

Steve interrupted softly, "Yes, Chuck. I know. It has been horrible. But we'll try to change all that—"

"Shut up, you fool," howled Chuck. "*Change it*? You're damn right we'll change it. That's what I'm trying to tell you. Them acres upon acres of what the Venusians think is good-for-

nothing vegetation . . . the stuff we're clearing away . . . do you know what is it?"

"Of course not," said Steve impatiently. "But—"

"Then I'll tell you," roared Chuck, "if you'll shut that big yap of yours and give me a chance to talk. It's—swamp-musk, Steve! The rarest epiphyte on Earth grows wild here on Daan like daisies. Swamp-musk—the basic ingredient of *methioprane*!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### A Friend in Need

FOR a moment while his blood seemed to halt in his veins, Stephen Duane stared at his friend. Then his heart resumed its interrupted tempo with violent resurgence, and he gripped Chuck's arm fiercely.

"Swamp-musk!" he choked. "Chuck—are you sure?"

"Listen," said Lafferty, "I ain't no surer of my own name. These swamps are simply *lousy* with that stuff. There's so much of it that if it was poison ivy I'd be one big itch on legs!"

"And the Venusians don't know what it is?"

Chuck snorted. "They know what it is. They call it *klaar*, which is Venusian for 'nuisance weed.' But they don't know what it can *do*, or why would they have us destroying it as fast as we can clear it out of the bogs?"

"Hell, no, Steve! They ain't nobody alive on these two worlds in this century that knows what *klaar* can do except you and me."

That, knew Stephen Duane, was true. The anesthetic gas, methioprane, had been an invention of his own, one upon which, of all mankind, only he and Chuck had worked. Its secret had slumbered with them in the oblivion

of subterranean Fautnox for fifteen centuries.

Now a great hope overwhelmed Duane. For the first time, a blazing shaft of light illuminated the murky fog of doubt through which he had stumbled, groping vainly for some means wherewith to overthrow Earth's rulers. The actual preparation of methioprane from swamp-musk was not a difficult feat of chemistry. It was one so simple, indeed, that a handful of men with but a few primitive pieces of equipment could create vast volumes of the potent gas. All needful now was to find the time, the place, the workers to perform this labor.

To Chuck he blazed, "That settles it! I've got to get you out of this camp! We've got to escape and find a hidden refuge where we can start manufacturing methioprane—and plenty of it. But, where? Where?" He beat his temple angrily with the heel of one fist, as if by so doing he could stimulate the duality of his Earth-Venusian brain to knowledge of some sanctuary.

But it was Lafferty who supplied the answer.

"Escape," he snorted, "your hat! What do we want to escape for? We got a ready-made laboratory all set up for us!"

"What?"

"Sure," explained Chuck. "The prison barracks. It's the perfect hide-out, Steve. Right under the Daans' noses, where they won't suspect a thing. If we lammed, they'd be out on our trails chasing us with whatever they use for bloodhounds on this stinking planet.

"But the Daans never come into or near our barracks; not even to feed us. We're nothing but swine to them. Our sty ain't fine enough for their lordly feet. They just dump our food at the



entrance to the prison area and let us find it or starve. When it's work time, they call us. When it's rest time, they kick us back into our pens and forget about us.

"All we need, Steve, is equipment. That's what *you've* got to do for us. Keep on playing the part of a Daan nobleman, and somehow find a way to smuggle lab equipment in here. And—" pledged Chuck Lafferty grimly—"I'll supervise the manufacture of enough methiophrane to put this whole damn planet to sleep till the crack of doom!"

Duane nodded happily. "That's the answer, Chuck. Yes, it's the perfect answer. But—yourselves? Beth, and the Mother Maatha, the others—can you endure this—?"

"Don't worry about us," grated Lafferty. "We've been enduring it with nothing to hope for. Now that there's a chance to fight back and do something, we'll be in there pitching." He grinned mirthlessly and paraphrased the staunch declaration of another fighting man in an earlier day. "Just give us the equipment, Steve, and we'll finish the job!"

SO DUANE left his friend. And when they had emerged from the tiny shack in which they had held the conversation which might decide the fate of the two worlds, Lafferty returned to the harracks and Steve called the waiting guard, Amarro, to lead him back to the higher, cleaner terrain whereupon were built the Daan administrative buildings.

Apparently Amarro had not presumed to eavesdrop on the conversation of a Venusian nobleman, but Steve felt he could detect an atmosphere of uncertainty or suspicion emanating from the prison guard. Several times as they wended their way through the treacherous barricades, Amarro

seemed on the verge of offering some query. More than once his eyes scrutinized Duane with curious speculation. But Steve silenced all attempts at speech with curt, monosyllabic grunts, and they reached their destination without an accusation having been made or denied.

Loala and the Chief Warden were awaiting his arrival. Apparently they had found subjects of mutual interest, for their heads were close together when Steve entered the administration building. They separated swiftly, and Grudo said in that greasy tone of semi-humility Steve loathed, "Greetings, O most noble Huumo! You have finished your questioning?"

"I have," grunted Steve disgustedly . . . and shrugged. "I was wrong. The creature is an ignorant earthman, vulgar and loutish as all his race. He is no Slumberer. Methinks there have never been such thing as Slumberers."

Loala studied him from beneath long, veiling lashes.

"You lingered long enough with this 'vulgar lout', my Captain."

Steve snarled, "The man had complaints to make, and I tarried to bear them. To be truthful, some of his grievances seem justified. He complained that the water prisoners are forced to drink is vile and disease-ridden, pointed out that his companions sicken and die like lice."

Grudo laughed coarsely. "What matter? When these slaves die there are thousands more on our colony."

"Nevertheless," said Steve, "the human's point was well taken. Sick slaves are valueless. I told the man I would do something to assure them a supply of cleaner water. But—" he added hastily—"I also told him we would turn no hand to provide for their comfort. What they want done they must do for themselves."

"Still it will do no harm for us to provide them with the needed equipment. You can requisition a distillation unit, Grudo? Some vats, coils, storage containers . . . that sort of thing?"

"Why," acknowledged Grudo frowning, "I suppose so. But—"

And he glanced at the Lady Loala questioningly. Her gray-green eyes had never left Steve's face. Now those eyes hardened to the color of frosted agate. She said slowly,

"Yes, Captain Huumo, that seems harmless enough, and can be done. Perhaps you yourself would like to help the earthlings install this unit?"

Duane said eagerly, "Why—why, yes. I should be glad to help in any way—" Then he stopped abruptly, warned by the note of sarcasm in the girl's voice. "I, my Lady? I soil my hands in labor for such as these? I do not understand."

"On the contrary," said Loala, her voice more harshly grating than Duane had ever heard it, "I think you understand too well, *Captain Huumo!* So you learned nothing from the earthman, eh? You suspect there are no such creatures as Slumberers? But while you tarried, plotting with your friend—we have learned otherwise! Grudo, call the informer!"

Her voice cracked like the bite of a lashing whip. Steve stared.

"What? I don't—"

Then the words of denial faltered and died on his lips. For Grudo had opened the door, and into the room now stepped one whose entrance was like that of a spectre of doom. An earthman with bandaged head who stared at Stephen Duane with eyes reflecting not only malice and triumph but—restored sanity.

To this one the Lady Loala spoke.

"Well," she cried, "is this he of whom you told us?"

And:

"Aye, it is he!" declared Eric von Rath. "Even beneath that disguise I know him well. He who stands before you is the Daans' worst enemy—that Slumberer known as Stephen Duane!"

**I**N THAT moment of betrayal tottered and fell the dreamworld of freedom Stephen Duane had been building within his heart. This was the one blow he had feared, and it had fallen. Von Rath's mind had cleared at last of its amnesia, and his first act had been to align himself with humanity's foes.

This, knew Duane with dull, sickening certainty, was the end of the trail; the last act of a drama foredoomed to tragedy. Gone now was the last hope he might live to see Earth liberated.

But if he died, as he would surely die, there was one who would not live to gloat upon his passing. With a cry of rage Steve ripped his ray crystal from its pouch on his harness, turned it upon the suddenly blanching von Rath and fingered its press.

But even as its lethal flame spewed from the opening, his enemies moved. Grudo hurled himself forward, dragging Steve to the floor by sheer brute force, slashing the weapon from his grasp. The rays spent themselves aimlessly on adamant walls and ceilings. And Grudo cried, "A hand here, Amarro! Secure me this skulking spy."

Against two strong and determined foes Steve Duane was helpless. A few minutes later, bleeding and disheveled, hands lashed to his sides with coils upon coils of biting plastic cord, he stood staring defiantly at his captors.

"Very well," he ground. "I am Stephen Duane, one of the Slumberers. The masquerade is over and this scene

of our little playlet is done. But the curtain has not yet fallen on the last act. Though I die, what I have fought for lives on. Others like myself will rise after me. And I tell you now, proud Overlords of Earth, the day will surely come when humanity shall overthrow your tyrannies as mankind ever in the past has destroyed those who set themselves up in omnipotence.

"And as for you, von Rath—" He turned blazing eyes to the German, smirking out of combat range—"if ever again these bonds are stricken from my hands, those hands will surely throttle the breath from your black throat."

Von Rath laughed uneasily.

"That is a vow you will never keep, *mein Leutnant*. The Daans, like myself, are realists. They are too clever to allow an avowed enemy to exist. We understand each other, I and they. Meanwhile, for your insolence—"

And he took a step forward, arm lifted to strike the bound prisoner before him. But the Lady Loala stayed his gesture with a command.

"Stop, earthman! Presume not overmuch on your newly-won favor. The Daans need no human aid in handling their captives. Begone about your business until you are sent for."

THE German wilted before her gaze. With a muttered apology he slunk away. Then turned the Lady Loala to her one-time favorite, and though she spoke imperiously still, her tone was edged with the faintest note of regret.

"Now this is a mad thing you have done, Steve of Emmetty," she said. "Have you no wisdom? Were you not content to leave things as they were?"

Steve said, "No, my Lady. I do not expect you to understand—quite. But perhaps you can if I tell you that in the day whence I came, earthmen were not

the cringing, servile creatures you have known them to be. They were a strong race, proud and noble as your own. I did what I could to regain that lost freedom. No human worthy of the name would have been content to do otherwise."

"I am not speaking now of governments or empires, human Steve," said the silver lady softly. "Years change all things. No reasoning soul but realizes that some day Daan's dominion over Earth was bound to pass. But all this might have come in the fullness of time. It was not necessary you should hold yourself alone responsible for its accomplishment."

"So I speak not of empires, but of individuals. Did you not know when you espoused this foredoomed cause that your failure would spell an end to the dreams of intimacy you and I have shared?"

Even in the depths of his own darkest hour, Duane felt a shred of compassion for the Lady Loala. A Daan and an Overlord she was, but she was a woman, too, and one at this moment sadly forlorn.

He said quietly, "Aye, my Lady. Even this I knew."

"Then how could you, Steve of Emmetty? Why did you—?"

She stopped abruptly, her gray-green eyes narrowing shrewdly. "I begin to understand. Then these, too, your professions of admiration for me, they were all part of the plan. They, too, were insincere."

Steve said with perfect candor, "No, my Lady Loala, they were not altogether insincere."

"Not *altogether*!" The Overlord seized the words, hurled them back at him through clenched teeth. "But in part, at least! There is another woman, then, whose charms you find more alluring than those of the Lady

Loala? Yes, there is! I read it in your eyes. Speak, I command you! Which is she who has so captured your fancy? Speak, that I may teach her the folly of pitting her fleshly wiles against the magnificence of a Daan princess.

"Is she perhaps that muck-begrimed slut who cried aloud your name in the prison camp? Or some other flabby creature, cowering in her hut on distant Earth? Speak, I say!"

But Duane said nothing, and after a tense moment the flame died from the Lady Loala's eyes. Her features tightened to a silver mask, and she turned to the guard Amarro.

"Remove this creature from my sight," she commanded. "He should die now, but the Supreme Council must be shown that there *were* Slumberers, and that one was in our very midst. Turn him into the pens with his fellow swine."

And she turned her back. Amarro prodded Steve toward the door. "Move along, earthman," he commanded gruffly.

They left the administration building, started toward the prison camp. But when the door had closed behind them, and they two were alone, a strange thing happened. Amarro turned and stared at Steve, long and appraisingly, then spoke a sentence which sent a blaze of fire coursing through Steve's veins.

"You are a strange person," he said. "You arouse my curiosity, earthman. Tell me—*have you kinsmen on distant Terra?*"

## CHAPTER XVII

### Fortress in the Fen

OUT of the depths of despair, Amarro's simple query came to Duane like the warm and welcome hand of a

friend in blinding fog. Excitement hammered his pulse-beats to a rising fever. In vain he reminded himself that Amarro's choice of words might be purely coincidental, that the Daan prison guard might be, as he had claimed, merely curious. For Steve was thinking of Okuno's last instructions. He heard again the voice of the grave and gentle masquerader on Earth:

"Mark well this interchange, O Slumberer. Should one say to you, 'Have you kinsmen on distant Terra?', answer that questioner—"

And—for better or worse—Steve responded as he had been told.

"Aye," he said, his eyes searching Amarro's face, "I have many brothers."

And his breath caught in his throat as the guarded light in Amarro's eyes lifted, and his captor said firmly but clearly, "The brave never lack for brethren, O Dwain!"

A cry of gladness almost escaped Duane's lips. Okuno had spoken truly when he said that even in the most unexpected places might be found allies.

"Then you," cried Steve, "are one of us. You, too—"

"*Hush!*" Amarro warned him sharply. "Careful, O Dwain! Warn them not. We must move swiftly."

"When we reach the barricade, I will pause to remove your bonds, and motion you toward the prison camp with leveled ray-gun. You must seize the gun and strike me senseless with it. Stay not your strength, but strike hard and true that none may suspect me. It is important I should remain at this post I have held ever since the *former* Amarro visited Earth."

"I get it," breathed Steve. "Then what shall I do? Where shall I go?"

"Flee to the swamp-edge," Amarro's nod designated the direction. "There, beside a small dock, you will find a

motor-skiff. Leap into this, press the red stud on the instrument panel, and its automatic controls will speed you to my private refuge hidden in the fens. There await me. I shall come to you as soon as possible."

"And the other prisoners?"

"Think not of them, O Dwain, but of yourself. Now, the moment approaches—"

"Wait," breathed Steve hastily. "There is one thing vitally important. You heard my request for distillation apparatus?"

"Yes."

"Then somehow see that this machinery is smuggled to those in the camp. Will you do this?"

"I will, O Dwain. And now, in the name of freedom, strike—and strike hard!"

And with the words, Amarro sheared the bonds from Duane's wrists, thrust a hand against Steve's shoulder coarsely, and cried that all might hear, "Into your wallow, pig of Earth! Join your fellow—*aaah!*"

His sentence died in a groan as Steve, obeying his instructions to the letter, tore the weapon from his grasp and slashed it violently across the Daan's head. Amarro sank to the ground, a limp and sodden mass. And Duane fled.

HOURS later, when Stephen Duane and Amarro met again, it was under strangely new conditions. When, from the tiny island upon which his precipitant flight had ended, he heard throbbing in his ears the hum of an atomic motor similar to that propelling the boat which conveyed him hither, he rose and sought cover, emerged only when he was certain the arrival was none other than his newfound ally. Then he hurried to the beach and welcomed Amarro.

"Thank God," he breathed, "you're all right! I couldn't wait to see. But you fell so heavily I was afraid I struck too hard."

Amarro grinned ruefully.

"You struck," he assured Steve, "hard enough. But that was well. I was still unconscious when they found me. No one dreams I aided your escape."

"Should you wonder how I managed to get here so soon, I'm supposedly searching for you. And I am but one of scores, O Dwain. Grudo sent an emergency call to headquarters, and soon these fens will be combed by a hundred bloodthirsty Daans."

Steve said, "Then must I press on still farther?"

"No. This island is small, and it is but one of thousands in this wild, uncharted swampland. Though the eternal mists they might search for weeks without ever stumbling upon it. But even if they should—" Amarro grinned—"they won't find you. Because you will be completely out of sight."

"On this exposed beach?"

"Only surfaces," reminded Amarro, "are exposed, O Dwain. There is more here than meets the eye. Help me shift these motorcraft to concealment; then I will show you."

A few minutes later, their boats hidden beneath the small landing pier, Amarro led Steve to what appeared to be a small natural promontory near the center of the island. Before a huge granite boulder, taller by half than a man, he stopped, scabbled briefly in the sand, and uncovered a small metal disc. This he fingered in a curious fashion. And as he did so, Stephen Duane gasped aloud. For the boulder, which had seemed firmly entrenched in its foundation, swung smoothly to one side, exposing a narrow, artificial passageway leading into the subterranean

bowels of the island refuge.

AMARRO turned, smiling.

"Here, O Slumberer, is my *real* refuge, prepared against our hour of pressing need. Follow me to that which will be your home on Daan so long as you have need of one."

Full twenty feet the corridor drove into the heart of the jungle island, then opened into a series of underground chambers which were to be Stephen's hideout. And looking upon this place, hope blossomed within Duane more strongly than it had ever dared since his wakening from an age-old slumber.

For everything was here . . . everything. Not only food and drink with which to sustain life, but the little luxuries—soft beds and warm clothing; a musical instrument, the Daan's equivalent of a phonograph; books to read—were stored here as well. And—most important—constructed within the refuge were those two things which Duane needed most. A compact but efficient chemical laboratory, and a powerful ultra-wave communicator over which he could converse with Okuno on far-away Earth.

Swiftly Amarro instructed him in the operation of those Daan inventions with which he was not familiar. The atomic cooking-range and incinerating unit, the ultrawave transmitter. Then he gripped Steve's hand in farewell.

"I place my hand in thine thus, O Dwain," he said, "for thus I am told men pledged their faith in the old days. I must go now, ere my absence awakens suspicion. But be of good cheer. That which you asked me to do for the prisoners will be taken care of. Hidden safely here, do what you can and must, and from time to time I will visit you. But be at all times cautious. Stay off the surface of the isle, and answer no calls unless they be from

voices you recognize. Goodbye."  
And he was gone.

SO settled Stephen Duane for a period which on Earth would have been reckoned as three weeks. On slower-turning Venus, and especially here in these marshes which knew only the filtered light of cloud-drenched sunshine, it was hard to mark the passage of time. But days and nights meant nothing to Duane. When he hungered, he ate. When his brain and body wearied of the innumerable tasks to which he set himself, he slept.

Nor was his period of incarceration dreary. There was much to occupy his time. Twice Amarro came furtively and left with equal stealth, each time advising Steve as to the progress of those still captive in the prison camp.

Much, Amarro told him, had been accomplished. The administrative buildings of the camp were a beehive thronged with Daan warriors who each dusk returned disgruntled and petulant. Meanwhile, as the search for the fugitive Slumberer preoccupied the Daans, the back-breaking labor of the Earth prisoners had been suspended. Amarro, with no voice to say him nay, had requisitioned a "water distillation unit" for the convict barracks. And now night and day earthmen and women labored with rekindled vigor to turn out in vast quantities containers of that gaseous by-product Chuck Lafferty was distilling from Venusian *klaar*.

"It is my task," Amarro said proudly, "to smuggle these containers out of the camp and into those strategic points which we must strike when the Day of Freedom dawns. And you, O Dwain? You have spoken to our brethren on Earth?"

"Constantly," Steve told him grimly. "And there's good news from there,

too. Okuno tells me word of the Slumberers' awakening has spread like wild-fire throughout all of Tizathy. Converts flock to our rallying-points from every mount and valley, lake and plain.

"One strong and gallant ally has Okuno found. A golden warrior-priestess from the hills of Jinnia. It appears this priestess, Meg, and her consort, one known as Daiv, are of a superior wisdom and culture. For several years they have known the Great Secret: that the gods of old were no 'gods' at all, but men like us. And in their own small way they have transmitted the Revelation over vast areas. Now have they joined our cause, and those who follow them number in the hundreds of thousands. But you spoke of strategic points, Amarro? You mean the palace of the Supreme Council; such places as that?"

"That is the one place," confessed Amarro ruefully, "we have been unable to cache cylinders of our anesthetic weapon. But elsewhere in public buildings, and even on ships of the Great Armada—"

"Wait!" interrupted Steve sharply. "That reminds me. Here is something Chuck Lafferty will want to know—"

And before Amarro left, Duane sketched for him a series of diagrams which should prove of vital interest to Lafferty's laborers when, as Amarro had phrased it, the Day of Freedom dawned.

THUS three weeks sped more swiftly than waters churning a millrace. And at last came the hour when Duane felt the long-delayed blow might be struck.

He knew full well the dangers before him and his comrades. But he knew equally well that their preparations were as well laid as was humanly possible, and that with each succeeding

day the danger of their conspiracy being detected loomed ever nearer.

Thus, speaking to Okuno over the now familiar ultra-wave circuit, he issued to that salient's commander the order Okuno had been awaiting.

"The hour has come, my friend," he said simply. "Strike when you will."

Across more than twenty-five million miles of yawning space Okuno's voice broke in a little gasp.

"You mean we can strike without fear of reprisal, O Slumberer? The Venusian fleet has been rendered impotent?"

"Not as yet," said Duane. "But it will be. You on Earth must strike before we do. We need the confusion and turmoil into which news of your uprising will throw the Daan militia to serve as a shield concealing our own final preparations. When excitement has blinded them to the small but important movements we must make, we too will strike."

"So be it," acknowledged Okuno with a blind confidence which warmed Duane's heart. "Then this shall be our last conversation, O Eternal One, until the fight is won. May the gods of Earth bless you!"

"And may they," said Duane, "fight at your side as you herald the dawning of a new day. Till we meet again, my friend!"

And the connection was severed.

There remained now but one thing. To inform Amarro when he visited that night—as he had promised to do—that already the Earth rebellion was under way, and to set into motion those wheels which his and Lafferty's efforts had greased.

So Stephen Duane, tense and impatient for the first time since he had sought refuge, paced the floor of his underground refuge like a caged tiger, awaiting the grate of stone upon sand

which would bespeak Amarro's arrival.

But the sound which finally reached his waiting ears was one even more cheering. For it was as though Amarro, by some prescience, had guessed the significance of this night's meeting. The sound which reached Duane's ears from the island surface was not the guard's husky whisper—but the sound of his own name, loudly cried in a dear, familiar voice.

"Dwain! Steve! Where are you? Open to me swiftly!"

Duane's heart leaped. Beth! Amarro must have told her of this spot, and in the fogs above she was searching for him on a barren island.

He needed no second bidding. Eagerly he raced up the corridor, released the catch which opened the boulder door, stepped forth—and into sight of a company of armed Daans at whose head stood Grudo, and with whom was a silver woman who, even now, was lifting again her voice in perfect imitation of Beth's loved tones.

"Dwain! O Steve!"

Steve Duane choked, "Loala—you! It was a trick; a trap!"

Then he said nothing more. For at that moment something brutally hard smashed down upon his head with crushing force. The fog of Daan thickened to eddying darkness, and Stephen Duane pitched forward, senseless, into the waiting arms of his captors.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### The Offer of Loala

WHAT Duane recalled of the ensuing hours was a maelstrom of confusion, a phantasmagoria composed of incoherent snatches, peopled with creatures who moved before his vision fleetingly, lingered for a moment, then faded.

Later he dimly recalled once opening his eyes to find himself lying in the thwarts of a motor skiff scudding through the tortuous channels of a marshland stream. He was conscious of dank mists choking his nostrils and the humid spray of fen waters drenching him as the tiny craft sped toward an unguessed destination.

When next he awakened all this had disappeared. His body, which had been wet, was parched and dry; his mouth was cottony with thirst, and his head hammered brassily. He lay in the cabin of an aereo flashing swiftly through the atmosphere of Venus. A covey of armed guards surrounded him. When he muttered a feeble plaint for water, one dashed a dipperful in his face and laughed harshly as Steve, bound hand and foot, attempted to gulp a few precious drops.

Then again merciful unconsciousness welcomed him, and he knew no more until he awakened for a third time to find himself lying on a crude pallet within a metal-walled room which was obviously a prison cell in the palace of the Daan capital.

Of this he assured himself when, staggering weakly to his feet, he lurched to a grilled opening in one wall and looked down across a great courtyard bristling with armed men over the rooftops of the Daan's mightiest city to the distant spacedrome which, even from this distance Steve could see, was swarming with a black host of humans and Daans performing indistinguishable tasks in, around, and about the spaceships of Daan's great Armada.

His head still throbbed terribly, but with each passing moment an iota of additional strength seeped back into his superbly conditioned body. And save for a weakness born solely of hunger and thirst, Stephen Duane was



very nearly recuperated from the effects of his recent assault by the time his gaolers discovered he had come to.

Then one of the warders came with welcome refreshment and unwelcome tidings. As he pushed the first through a movable grill in the corridor door, he donated the second freely.

"Still alive, eh, dog of Earth?" he taunted grimly. "Well, eat and drink heartily; this may be your last meal. You must have a skull of bronze, human. I did not expect to find you on your feet when I came here."

Steve said, "I'm in the palace tower?"

"That's right," grunted his gaoler. "But not for long. The Supreme Council has ordered you be brought before them as soon as you waken. They have a few questions to ask before—"

He left the matter of Steve's fate dangling, but the smirk of malice on his lips was suggestion enough.

Steve asked, "And the excitement at the spacedrome? What means that?"

THE guard grinned evilly.

"It means an end to all coddling of you Earth scum. We Daans have been too lenient with you, human. But now your rebelliousness has taught us the error of our ways. We like not the news reaching us from your miserable planet. The Armada is being fueled and equipped to give you earthmen such a lesson in Daan justice as was never before taught. Now, no more questions. Prepare yourself to visit those who will judge you."

Thus a few minutes later Stephen Duane found himself for the second time in the great council hall of the palace of the Daans, face to face with the effete three who ruled the Venusian empire.

If he had thought before the Masters of Daan were a decadent set, he saw now convincing proof of this belief.

For strong men deal strongly with those who oppose them. Though they slay their enemies, they do so honorably and openly; oftentimes even with a reluctant recognition of their foe-men's prowess.

But weaklings respect not even the dignity of death. And the Venusian masters were weak. There was a feral spitefulness in their attitude toward him who stood before them. Though they blustered and threatened as they questioned Steve, he could sense beneath their vindictiveness an uncertainty, a superstitious dread, which under any other circumstances might have been almost laughable.

For one said to him petulantly, "So you are one of those whom humans call 'Slumberers?' Well, where are the god-like powers you boast? Can you free yourself from these halls? Can you call down the lightnings of heaven to strike us on our thrones? Can you stay the slow death on the rack which is your sure payment for the trouble you have caused us?"

Duane said slowly, savoring the moment, "Nay, Lords of Daan. These things I would not do if I could. But there is this I can promise you. Your puny vengeance on me will prove vain. For each drop of blood you force from my veins, a Daan shall make payment with his life. As my bones crumble beneath your instruments of torture, even so shall the empire of Daan crumble, crushing you beneath its fall."

Another of the Masters bleated fretfully, "You mouth great boasts, earthman, for one whose carcass shall soon rot on the ramparts of this citadel. But as you die so will all rebel earthlings like yourself. One by one shall we find those who defy us and mete out to them the punishment they deserve."

Duane laughed in the Master's face.

"So, my Lord? Some you will find perhaps. But—all? I wonder. Only a short time hence you received me with great honors in this very hall as the proud Daan nobleman, 'Captain Huumo.' Does not the memory of this strike fear to your bosom?

"Look about you, my Lord. These 'friends and noblemen' gathered in this chamber—can you tell which are true Daans and which masquerading earthmen like myself who, at any moment, may bury an avenging dagger in your breast?

"Look sharply, my Lord. For truly I tell you your highest councils are laced with humans like myself who will carry on the work for which you have condemned me. Look closely at each face. Can you tell which face is truly Daan and which is the artificially bleached complexion of an earthman? Aye, even look at each other, you three who sit in the highest seats of judgment. Are you certain that not even one of your own august body is an interloper, a spy waiting his moment to turn against you?"

**H**IS shrewd technique, his psychological employment of fifth column tactics borrowed from the masters of boring-from-within of his own era, found root in the suspicious hearts of the Masters. A bruit whispered about the council hall as Daan fingers sought weapons in Daan harnesses, and each listening nobleman edged cautiously from his nearest neighbor. Even the three Masters cast furtive glances at each other as though wondering if possibly—just possibly—there could be something in this man's taunts.

Then Steve's first accuser spoke again, his voice shrill.

"Enough of this! You were summoned hither to hear our judgment, not impugn the dignity and honor of

the master race.

"Your efforts are fruitless, earthman. Even now the Armada is being readied. From every city and town, hill and fen, have been conveyed hither hordes of slaves to load our spacecraft. Before Daan turns again upon its axis our mighty fleet will be soaring Earthward to lash your miserable planet with such horrors as never you dreamed could be unleashed.

"When this has been accomplished will be time enough to weed out such few false Daans as, like yourself, may have managed to insinuate themselves into our midst. So when you writhe upon the rack, person of Earth, think not of those trifling successes your rebel mobs have made on your native planet, but of the devastating vengeance which will surely reclaim our tottering colony."

The unwitting revelation stiffened Steve Duane with joy. His eyes lighted, and his lips parted in a grim smile.

"Successes, my Lord? Then our fighters have overthrown your strongholds as was planned?"

The Master's pale cheeks glowed with unaccustomed color as he realized his error. He said with sudden savagery, "It matters not. You came hither for trial, not triumph! Take him back to his dungeon, guard, until we have decided a fitting punishment for him."

And Duane was led away.

**B**UT judgment was not so swift in forthcoming as had been threatened. All that day Stephen Duane languished in his cell. Nor could he learn from his truculent guard anything more of that which was transpiring on faraway Earth. All Duane knew was that—apparently—Okuno's rebellion had been crowned with initial success. The

Master's slip of the tongue had revealed this; further proof lay in the ever-heightening excitement at the space-drome.

Its vast plain was like a mighty ant-hill upon which lay a hundred glistening metal eggs. To and from each of these objects filed streams of scurrying figures. One such column poured into a forward port of each ship, never afterward to emerge. These, Duane rightly guessed, would be the Daan warriors taking up transport quarters. The stern port was serviced by two files. One which approached slowly, heavy-laden with supplies, fuel, ammunition; the other of which streamed back to ordnance depots more swiftly to pick up new burdens. These would be the slaves, laboring to charge the fleet for its mission.

And watching these preparations, Steve felt his joy overshadowed with a sense of deepening sadness. The Master had spoken truly in claiming this Armada would overwhelm Earth's uprising. Soon these hundred rockets would blast from their cradles on flaming pillars to flash earthward.

And that, groaned Steve, was his fault. His capture had made it possible for the Daans to quell this rebellion. He had promised Okuno the spacefleet would be immobilized, then had permitted himself to fall pitiful prey to a woman's ruse. Had he but waited within the underground refuge until Amurro returned to tell him all was well and in readiness . . .

The sound of footsteps approaching his cell brought an abrupt end to Duane's mournful reverie. He moved from the window opening and squared his shoulders to meet as bravely as possible those finally coming to convey him to his doom.

There sounded the murmur of voices, then the grate of metal upon metal.

Slowly the door swung open, and a lone figure stepped into his cell. At the sight of this figure Duane's frozen mask slackened into lines of astonishment. For it was no warrior band which confronted him. It was, instead, she whose silver loveliness was surpassed on two planets only by the dust-gold beauty of one other.

It was the Lady Loala.

THEN Duane's surprise coalesced into a tiny grimace of understanding. He said slowly, "So, my Lady, you could not resist this last opportunity to taunt my helplessness."

"And—it was completely wrong, completely illogical. The Lady Loala should have flashed into instant indignation, lashed back at him with all the dignity and fury of her superior station. But strangely she did not. She said instead, in a mild and strangely troubled voice,

"You speak but half a truth, Stephen Duane. I could not resist this last opportunity to see you again—and to plead with you for sanity."

Duane stared at her starkly.

"Plead with me? You, Lady Loala? But this is madness. The Supreme Council has decided my fate—"

"Not yet," said the argent princess swiftly. "I have addressed myself to them, human Steve. I stand high in their council and in their favor. Even though you be the most dangerous rebel ever to set himself against the majesty of Daan, they have listened to my pleas. There is one last way in which I can save you."

"And that is—?" demanded Steve.

"We of Daan," said Loala simply, "have a great science. None surpass us in knowledge of mental and physiological change. You have seen how we inscribe electrical brain-images on metal cylinders. Similarly we can, if we wish, alter the entire brain struc-

tures of both Daans and humans.

"There is an operation can be performed upon you, Steve of Emmeity. A simple and painless one. You need but place yourself in a certain chamber, and of your own free will permit that our apparatus activate the electrical network which is your brain pattern. Our delicate instruments can utterly erase every thought and recollection which is now yours by changing the contours of your brain. Then by superimposing new forms upon this plastic gray matter, you can be given an entire new series of thought-habits and memories.

"In other words, human Steve, the Supreme Council has permitted this for my sake: that the human brain of Steve of Emmeity be expunged. And in its place you be given a new brain pattern; that of a true and loyal Daan. Well—?" She paused and looked at him breathlessly—"What say you, Steve of Emmeity?"

## CHAPTER XIX

### End of the Trail

FOR a moment Steve knew not what to say. It never occurred to him to doubt the truth of Loala's claim. One thing he had never questioned was the superb scientific ability of this race. His own knowledge of biological science assured him that such master surgeons as the Daans undoubtedly could accomplish this incredible feat.

The only question in his mind was: was it worthwhile he should save his life at such a cost? The thought struck him swiftly that it was not truly *his* life, the life of Stephen Duane, which would be saved. The fleshly frame which encompassed his personality would live and breathe, true. But that essence which was himself would, in

this operation, be as truly destroyed as if his heart were stilled.

He stammered, "But, Loala, if it is I you would save, surely you realize that after such an operation I would no longer be myself."

Loala said, "The change would alter your false ideologies, Steve of Emmeity. But it need not necessarily change those other things about you I—admire. The operation would remove the last traces of rebelliousness which separate me and thee. Your new brain pattern would retain only such things as—" fiercely—"once made you vow you found me desirable. Well, human Steve? Decide. For time grows short, and I may make this offer but a single time."

Steve said, "And if I accept, Lady Loala? What then would those who were my comrades think of me? They will see the body of Stephen Duane living proudly and gladly, a nobleman amongst Daans, consort of a Daan princess. They will know I have forsaken the cause, betrayed them—"

The Lady Loala waved a silver hand impatiently.

"They will think nothing, Steve of Emmeity, nor judge you not. When our spacefleet reaches Earth the rebellion will be quelled, and all those who had a part in it will be no more."

And it was then Stephen Duane realized, with a rising hope which was at the same time a heartbreaking sadness, that which he must do. That which was the last great service he could perform for the gallant men and women, the beautiful Earth, he loved.

He made his decision. And as one who shops at a market-place, he haggled for his bargain. To Loala of Daan he said softly, "I speak not to an Overlord and a princess now, but as a man of one world to a woman of another. Speak truly, my Lady. Do I mean so

much to you?"

Whatever Duane might have liked or disliked about this woman in the past there was one truth shining-clear. She was one who followed the urgings of her own desires, nor masked them not. She lifted frank gray-green eyes to his.

"Yes, Steve of Emmeity," she said candidly, "this much you mean to me."

"This much," pressed Steve, "and how much more? Would you, for my sake, stay the blow which is shortly to descend upon that Earth, those comrades whom you ask me to abandon?"

The Lady Loala said, "I do not understand."

"You know that a short time hence the Armada departs earthward. For my agreement to undergo this operation, will you arrange that the arrival of the Armada will not loose a fury of destruction? That the punitive expedition will reestablish control of Earth quietly, and with as little bloodshed as possible? In short, will you grant amnesty to my fellow rebels, nor wreak terrible vengeance upon them for what has been done?"

**L**OALA cried, "But this is impossible, Steve of Emmeity! Never has Daan supremacy been so threatened—"

"Never before," Steve reminded her, "did Slumberers awake. Nor ever again shall this happen. You have said yourself it is inevitable that at some future time Earth must be free. Now I bargain with you that we earthmen cease our efforts to accomplish this immediately, and you Daans refrain from destroying the human seed which shall, perhaps centuries hence when you and I are dust, liberate itself.

"Surely you see, my Lady Loala," he wheedled, "that what the *future* may bring concerns us not. *We* seek only

our present happiness—"

The Lady Loala was swayed. Her eyes mirrored indecision. She whispered, "But—but the Supreme Council—"

"Is weak," said Steve, "and you are strong, wielding great power over them. Hark, my Lady. Who is to say but that someday you and I, working side by side together, may not even rise to the posts of supreme authority now held by the decadent trio? Then could we not work out for both our planets a new design for living?"

"Hush!" warned Loala nervously. "You speak treason, Steve of Emmeity! To rise against the Supreme Council—"

"Is not folly," pleaded Steve. "You know as well as I that one sharp blow would depose them. And if the new brain you give me has daring and sincerity, this you and I can do together."

"Yes," whispered the Lady Loala. "You and I together. It is possible, Steve of Emmeity."

"Then you will do it? And even the ringleaders you will allow to go free? My friend, the one known as Chuck . . . the priestess Beth . . . ?"

The troubled eyes darkened swiftly, stormily.

"Nay," denied the Lady Loala savagely, "there is one who cannot go free! I will share you with no other woman, whether of Earth or Daan!"

"You need share me with no other," Steve reminded her with a trace of sadness, "when the operation is done. My mind and heart will be yours alone."

"But *she* will remember."

"Until," pointed out Steve, "the first time we meet and I know her not. Well, my Lady—what say you? You must decide swiftly. Footsteps approach. If I am not mistaken, the footsteps of my executioners."

The last words settled the indecision of the Daan princess. A shudder

coursed through her; instinctively one pale, soft hand stretched forth to touch Stephen Duane's arm possessively. And:

"Very well," cried the Lady Loala. "It shall be as you say. It is a bargain, Steve of Emmeity!"

Then as once again the cell door swung open, this time to expose a phalanx of Venusian guards come to convey their prisoner to execution, she whirled to face the soldiers like a lioness.

"Nay, touch him not!" she cried savagely. "I care not what your orders are; they will be countermanded so soon as I can reach the ears of the Supreme Council. This prisoner goes not to the rack, but to the Mental Laboratory. Take him thither. Prepare him for operation and await my coming."

SO entered Stephen Duane upon the last ordeal of an adventure the most imaginative man of his century might never have dared conceive.

To the Mental Laboratory he was led by grumbling but obedient guards. There he was stripped of all raiment containing any metallic appurtenances and prepared for placement into a cabinet similar to that wherein he had undergone a lesser and transitory change weeks—or was it ages?—ago on his native Earth.

True to her promise the Lady Loala tarried not long. Duane had waited but a few minutes when she burst breathlessly into the room bearing an order signed by the Masters of the Supreme Council. This she hurled at the guards and dismissed them. Now there were in the room but herself and Steve, the technologist of Daan mental clinic, and his assistant.

The master surgeon nodded acquiescence to Loala's query.

"The chamber is ready, my Lady. The operation can be performed whenever it pleases you."

Loala smiled at Steve. He found himself wondering dimly whether, when next he looked upon that smile, some trace of lingering sadness in his heart would remind him the lips which framed it were but second-best in his affection, or whether he would truly be so altered that his heart would thrill to bursting with its invitation.

He found it hard to believe that anything man or Daan could do, any device man or Daan might invent, could destroy the cherished vision of a dust-gold maiden locked in his heart, or broom away the memory of warm lips which had met his own in the touching-of-mouths. But . . .

"You are ready, Steve of Emmeity?" asked Loala softly.

He had made a bargain. And that it was a bargain, Duane knew well. The cost, the mental personality of one person, for perhaps a half million lives. One heart's longing balanced against the aspirations of an entire race. This was the greatest barter any man had ever made. It was no time for self pity. He should be fiercely glad such an opportunity had presented itself. He nodded.

"I am ready, Loala. Yet—" He smiled slowly—"there is one thing more. After I leave this cabinet I shall not care . . . but now, for the few seconds remaining to the brain of Stephen Duane, it is a matter of great curiosity. Tell me, my Lady, how goes the Earth rebellion?"

Loala said, "Though the cause is doomed, Steve of Emmeity, you should be proud to know you builded your movement well. Everywhere your followers have overwhelmed our Earth garrisons. Kleevtun has fallen and Washtun; Asbful, Sangleez; every

citadel on Tizathy.

"Even our outposts on other Earth continents are in rebel hands. Blin, Lunnon, Kiro, a hundred more. Aye, even strong Sinnaty, which was my bastion and pride, is now the stronghold of a rebel masquerader whom I considered one of my loyalest nobles, the Lord Okuno."

"And I have your promise," said Steve, "that mercy will be granted these rebels when the Armada reaches Earth?"

THE Lady Loala nodded. "That I swear, Steve of Emmeity. In fact—" She paused, glanced suddenly at the moving hand of a chronometer set in the laboratory wall—"in fact, I have the assurance of the Council that such orders are to be audiod to every commander of the fleet before the Armada jets for Earth, moments hence. If you would enter the cabinet with the spoken vow of Daan honor in your ears, you may hear for yourself . . ."

She turned to the wall, pressed a stud set therein, and from a small grill issued a voice Steve Duane remembered. It was that of one of the Masters of the Supreme Council.

"—therefore we," he was saying, "the Masters of Daan, do hereby command and ordain that this punitive expedition shall refrain from accomplishing that utter destruction of the Earth colony previously ordered. It is our sage decision—"

The voice droned on. Steve turned grateful eyes to the waiting Overlord.

"You have done well, O Loala. It is as I said; they are weaklings, you are strong."

"It was not easy," Loala told him. "But I pointed out that with you, the spearhead of the rebellion, blunted, the movement would falter and die. Moreover, I appealed to their greed, point-

ing out our continuous need for human slaves. And now, Steve of Emmeity, can you seek forgetfulness and a new life with a happy heart?"

Not with a *happy* heart, thought Steve regretfully. Never with a happy heart. But at least with one fear-free and comforted by the knowledge his comrades were safe. He took a step forward.

"Yes, my Lady. I am ready."

And he opened the door of the cabinet . . . then whirled, startled. For the door of the clinic had burst open suddenly, and into the room charged one so maddened with fury that his face was drawn into almost unrecognizable lines. A voice smote Duane's ears with raging violence, but the accusation of the newcomer was hurled not so much at Steve as at she who stood a few paces from his side.

"So, my Lady Loala!" screamed the earthling traitor, von Rath. "You, too, have fallen a victim to the mouthings of this lying Slumberer! Even you, a Daan, would betray the master race!"

Loala's eyes glistened. Her arm lifted.

"Earthman," she cried, "depart! It is not yours to judge the decision of the Overlords."

"It is mine," screamed von Rath, "to destroy one who would overthrow the master race of which I am a Brother. Even though the Council be beguiled, I am not. You, Stephen Duane, die *now!*"

And with the swiftness of a striking cobra his hand tugged a ray-weapon from its harness, pointed at Steve and clenched convulsively.

## CHAPTER XX

"And Thus Be It Ever . . ."

FLAMING radiation from the crystal seared a livid path across the

room. Duane gasped and tumbled to the floor, hands clawing futilely at his own harness, now stripped of all defensive weapons, rolled and pulled to his knees, trying to close the gap between himself and his attacker before the maddened German could spear him on that lethal ray.

But if Steve was weaponless, another was not. A cry of burning rage burst from the lips of the Lady Loala, and a whirring something whispered a threnody of death across the room as she whipped a small, jeweled dagger from her side, hurled it at von Rath.

Too hastily she threw. The poniard missed its mark. But in ducking away, the one-time Nazi spy caught the whirling impact of the dagger's pommel on his right wrist. His crystalline weapon flew from nerveless fingers, skittered across the floor, rays of death still spuming from its orifice.

Duane needed but that one moment. With a leap and a bound he was upon the man to whom he had promised death should ever again they meet.

Von Rath, scrambling after his fallen weapon on all fours, swiveled in time to see unleashed vengeance crashing toward him. He forgot the crystal then, and with a shrill cry of panic turned to flee.

But he never reached the door. Steve caught him first. And there was inexorable certainty in the settling of his hands about the German's throat.

"This I promised you, von Rath," he roared. "It comes late, but at last it comes!"

And his fingers tightened.

What von Rath screamed in those last moments, Duane did not know nor ever was to learn. Perhaps his last breath cursed the fellow Slumberer whose hands with dreadful certainty crushed the breath of life from his lungs. Perhaps in that last moment

the son of pagan Germany voiced futile pleas to a forgotten God. Whatever his words, they found no hearkening ear. Steve's great hands tightened till a darkness thickened the traitor's veins, and his tongue thrust from gasping lips. Tightened until hoarse rawls choked into silence and the body before him became a dead weight beneath his grasp.

Then, and only then, Stephen Duane's tense fingers unclenched. The flesh which had housed Eric von Rath slumped to the floor like a bag of sodden meal. It was then, too, Stephen Duane turned to the woman of Daan.

"Now, indeed," he said, "can I suffer *any* change a happier man. It was worth waiting—*Loala!*"

THE cry burst from his lips. Shocked, he leaped across the chamber to where the two technicians bent anxiously over their fallen princess. Brushing them aside, Steve lifted the girl's head, cradled it in the crook of his elbow.

"Loala!" he cried. "My princess! What—?"

Then understanding struck him.

"Von Rath!" he whispered. "His weapon! As it flew from his hand, its rays struck you!"

And the silver woman's eyelids lifted slowly.

"Yes, Steve of Emmeity," whispered Loala. "It was meant for you. But I am almost glad it happened thus."

Steve whirled to the chief surgeon.

"Well, *do* something!" he cried. "You're a medical man, aren't you? Don't just stand there; do something!"

The Daan savant shook his head slowly.

"There is little we can do. Her flesh is charred to a crisp. Had we time—" He frowned—"we could graft new flesh to her burns, perhaps save her life.



But the operation would take hours. She cannot live so long. She would die under the knife."

Duane cried, "But you've got to try *something!*"

And again Loala's eyes opened for a moment. He had to bend to hear her words.

"It does not matter, Steve of Emmelty. It would never have worked anyway, my plan. Though science altered your brain, no instrument could erase the scorings on your heart.

"In a month, a year—who knows?—one day at sight of that Earth woman an ancient memory would have wakened within you, and I would have lost you again. It is better this way. But—" She smiled feebly—"you did, just now, call me . . . your princess. Did you not, Steve of Emmelty?"

A warmth misted Duane's eyes, and he whispered hoarsely, "I did, O Mistress of Every Delight."

"And this time," smiled Loala wanly, "you meant it, human Steve. It is enough. But—" A slight shudder stirred through her—"what is that I hear? A voice speaks madness. Someone cries your name!"

And Steve, stunned, looked up. In this moment of true sorrow he had not realized his name was roaring through the audio unit. Now he heard it again, clarion-clear, in the voice of Chuck Lafferty.

"Steve!" Chuck was crying. "Steve, can you hear me? It's all right, pal. We've got 'em!"

STEVE rose, the weight of Loala a mere nothingness in his arms, hurried to the wall and pressed the button which opened the audio to a two-way transmission.

"Lafferty!" he cried into the orifice. "This is Duane! Where are you, boy? What do you mean? Have you—?"

And Chuck's voice returned, riotously triumphant. "Wherever you are, Steve, take a look out the nearest window."

Steve turned. Within the past few minutes, unheard in the confusion which had reigned here, a hundred thunderous blasts must have scorched the heavens over Daan. For now, roaring high above the city, circled the mighty armada of the Overlords.

Steve cried, "The fleet! It has taken off! But Chuck, where are you calling from?"

And incredibly — Chuck Lafferty laughed again.

"Don't look now, Steve," he belowered, "but them ships you're looking at is *us!* We've captured every last vessel in the Daan spacefleet! Me and the rest of the slaves! We did what you said . . . carried containers of methioplane into the ships while we were supposed to be loading them for the flight . . . then dumped the stuff loose in the air distribution outlets you charted for us. The Venusians is gone beddy-hye. But our bunch was wearing masks and we've grabbed the Armada without a casualty!"

"And—the ground defenses?"

"One peep out of them," chortled Chuck, "and we'll blast 'em from here to breakfast! Our guns is manned, and I've notified the Supreme Council that if they don't surrender unconditionally and Johnny-on-the-spot we'll put all Daans to sleep for the next couple of thousand years!"

Loala stirred in Steve's arms. And curiously, in those eyes which should have shown grief at the defeat of her empire, there was something akin to pride. She whispered,

"Then you succeeded after all, my Steve. Somehow . . . I am . . . almost glad . . ."

"Loala!" choked Steve. Then an

idea struck him. He turned to the silent surgeon. "Time!" he rasped. "You said *time* is what you need?"

"Yes, earthman. She cannot live much longer—"

"She can," roared Steve, "and she *will*! Chuck! Send someone here to the Mental Laboratory of the palace with *methioprane*. And—hurry, man! For God's sake, hurry! The life of a brave woman depends on the speed of your actions!"

Then, to the medical experts, "Get your tables ready, and what instruments you need. My men are bringing you an anesthetic which will give you all the time you need. Under it, the Lady Loala will not die because she *cannot*. And by the time she comes to—God knows how long hence—her scars will be completely healed.

"Loala, you understand what I am doing? It will be a long sleep. When you awaken, I will be gone. But it is the only way—"

He stopped speaking. For the gray-green eyes had closed, and the Lady Loala lay unconscious in his arms. Stephen Duane bent tenderly. For the first, last, and only time in his life he touched his lips to the brow of the silver princess. And:

"Sleep well, my Lady Loala!" whispered Steve. "Sleep well and safely, O Mistress of a Thousand Charms . . ."

THUS went the Lady Loala, most beautiful and noblest of all Daan Overlords, to an age-long sleep. Nor was she the only Daan to seek the frozen slumber of *methioprane*. When centuries hence she awakened, it would be in a strangely new and—Stephen Duane hoped—a better world. But amidst its strangeness she would find herself surrounded by at least a handful of warriors, courtiers, and friends from this present era.

For not with complete complaisance did all the Daans accept defeat at the hands of their erstwhile slaves. Some there were, staunch fighting men, who—though they fought in the cause of decadent empire—utterly refused to surrender. Their stubborn resistance found humane ending beneath the breath of the new anaesthetic weapon.

And even when all active opposition had been quelled, and a cringing Supreme Council had accepted every one of Stephen Duane's demands, there were a few proud nobles who preferred oblivion to the "ignominy and disgrace" of living under a new interplanetary order under which—as Duane's charter plainly set forth—henceforth Earth was to govern itself and pay no fealty to Daan, earthmen and Daans were to meet in future commerce and council not as Overlords and slaves, but as equals.

To those who could not swallow their pride for the betterment of both races, Duane granted the boon they asked, hoping that by the time they awakened from their slumbers, two brave new worlds would have proven the justice of Earth's liberation.

Other matters of state were arranged before the earthlings finally sought the ship which was to carry them back to their native planet.

All human slaves were freed; their owners pledged to compensate them for years spent in penniless toil. Promise of the Daan Scientific Council was exacted that this society would lend its aid to the nascent Earth empire, assisting the backward planet in rehabilitating its lost knowledge and culture.

Ambassadorships were arranged, and the groundwork for future trade treaties laid. Then, that Earth might have some measure of self defense whilst its citizens engaged in what must surely be decades—perhaps centuries—of recon-

struction, the Daan armada was split into two parts.

One half of this magnificent fleet, manned by erstwhile slaves under Daan instructors, was henceforth to be Earth's property. But, fairly, Duane did not simply seize these ships . . . though they would have been a small payment for the years of subjugation under which earthlings had labored. A fair valuation was set, and for the space-navy Earth's new government promised to pay in commercial products needed by the Venusians.

SO finally were concluded all these negotiations immediately necessary. And because Duane's heart hungered for sight again of his sun-blessed native planet, its sweet, green hills and foam-lashed seas, at last came the day when Earth's new spacefleet was to take off for its home base.

Upon the bridge of the flagship stood those who had captained humanity to freedom. All preparations had been made; now but a word of command was needed to thrust these fifty-odd giants into the void on pillars of flame.

One last look cast Steve Duane at the mighty skyline of Daan's capital. Then he issued the word.

"Home!" he said simply.

And in more than four dozen vessels propelling studs were pressed, and the heavens shook with the thunder of roaring jets.

Chuck Lafferty made a strange, rinsing movement with his hands.

"So that," he sighed, "is that. Us and Caesar, eh, Steve? Now for good old Mother Earth, and a long nap."

Steve grinned at him.

"That's what you think, chum. If a nap's what you want, you'd better take advantage of the ten-day trip through space. Because when we get back to Earth we're going to be the busiest guys alive. .

"There's a big job facing us, Chuck. Us and all mankind. We have a wide world to reclaim, centuries of lost time to make up. And," he admitted frankly, "I don't know what you think about it, but I'm looking forward to it eagerly."

"This is the chance of a thousand lifetimes. A chance to start all over,



He kissed her. "We've won, sweetheart, the flag shall fly over Earth again!"

with a clean slate. Build the kind of civilization men have always dreamed of, but never before achieved. A civilization built on friendship, honor, and truth; mutual understanding and sympathy. If we make a go of it, even the Daans will fall in line; recognize our self-seized rights to be considered their equals."

The Mother Maatha said raptly, "Aye, even so, O Dwain. Thus, too, it was written in the Promise. That a new world should spring from the waking of the Slumberers."

Steve turned to the dust-gold girl beside him, smiling.

"And what say you, my priestess Beth? What shall be your part in these new endeavors?"

THE girl lifted eyes wide with question to his.

"But what else should I do," she asked, "than remain with you to council and advise you, O Dwain? Where else should I be than at the side of my mate?"

Chuck snorted amusement. "That's one thing you ain't going to change in the new world, Steve," he chuckled. "The men will still be doing the work, but the women will still be cracking the whip."

The shadow of an old misgiving clung to Stephen Duane. To Beth he said, "And why would you stay with me, my Beth? Because I am one of the gods?"

And this time there was no awe, but something else, something finer and truer and more to Steve's heart's liking, in Beth's eyes as she answered him softly.

"Nay, my Steve, but because you are—a man."

Steve took her into his arms. It was a moment worth waiting for, a dream worth all he had experienced. For her nearness warmed him with a promise of happiness to come, even through the long and arduous days which lay before them.

The gentle voice of the Mother Maatha was like a benediction on their love.

"We could not fail," she said. "We could not ever fail. For thus it was promised us ages hence in the sacred song of the Ancient Ones.

*"And thus be it ever," she quoted, "when freemen shall stand*

*'Between their loved hoams and the war's desolation;*

*'Blessed with victory and peace, may the Heav'n rescued land*

*'Praise the power that hath made and preserved us a nation. . . ."*

Stephen Duane picked up the old, familiar words, repeating them softly:

*"Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,*

*'And this be our motto: "In God is Our Trust!"*

*'And the Star-Spangled Banner, . . ."*

"It will fly again, Steve," said Chuck, "now."

*" . . . forever shall wave*

*'O'er the land of the free. . . ."*

"*'And Thy hoam,'*" finished Beth, her eyes worshipful upon her mate, "*'O Thou Brave!'"*

For a woman always has the last word. So, too, it was in the old days. . . .

#### "THE GHOST THAT HAUNTED HITLER"

Remember Lidice! Certainly you do! And here's a story that you'll remember too! It'll chill your blood! make you stand up and cheer! It's one of the finest stories to come out of the war thus far. Don't risk missing it!

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## ROMANCE OF THE ELEMENTS — Manganese



**WHEN WAR** RECENTLY PERILED VITAL HIGH-CONCENTRATE MANGANESE ORE IMPORTS FROM RUSSIA, INDIA, AFRICA, U.S. METALLURGISTS CAST CALCULATING EYES AT AMERICA'S VAST--BUT MAINLY LOW-CONCENTRATE--DEPOSITS. WAR NEEDS MAKE FEASIBLE THE REDUCTION OF RELATIVELY LOW CONCENTRATE ORES.

IN SOUTH DAKOTA SHALE, ALONE, THEY SAY SOME 800,000,000 TONS OF MANGANESE AWAIT EXTRACTION!

**BODY ARMOR** OF MANGANESE STEEL WAS WORN BY BRITISH TROOPS IN WORLD WAR I! A LITTLE MANGANESE IN STEEL DEOXIDIZES, DESULPHURIZES. LOW MANGANESE STEELS ARE STRONG, TOUGH, HARD. ODDLY ENOUGH, STEELS OF HIGH-MANGANESE CONTENT WEAR OUT QUICKLY DIGGING IN SAND, BUT THRIVE ON HARD KNOCKS! MANGANESE DIOXIDE IS IMPORTANT TO DRY BATTERIES.

**AMERICA'S REVOLUTIONARY WAR** WAS RAGING WHEN EUROPE'S JOHN GOTTLIEB GAHN FIRST ISOLATED MANGANESE FROM PYROLUSITE, AN ORE ALCHEMISTS USED FOR YEARS IN THE BLEACHING OF GLASS...



**MANGANESE** VITAL TO PLANT GROWTH, IS PRESENT IN ALL VEGETATION; THE ELEMENT, THEY SAY, IS PRODUCED WHEN PLANTS DECOMPOSE!



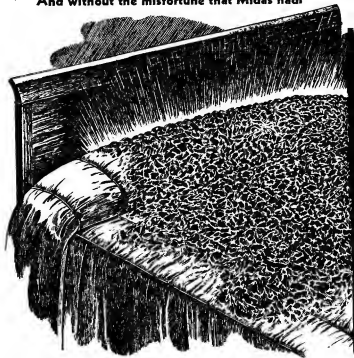
JOHN GOTTLIEB GAHN

**MANGANESE** is number 25 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Mn. and its atomic weight is 54.93. It is a hard, brittle, gray or reddish-white metal, which has the appearance of cast iron. Its specific gravity is 7.42. It melts at 1230°C. It is prepared by the reduction of the oxide by aluminum in the "thermite" process. It precipitates many metals from a solution of their salts. It is used in a large scale in the manufacture of non-rusting steel.

NEXT MONTH: The Romance of Mercury

# *The GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY*

It was the break of a lifetime. Here in Lefty Feep's grasp was the Midas touch. And without the misfortune that Midas had!



# of *LEFTY FEEP*



Lefty watched the bedspread  
turn a lustrous golden color

by **ROBERT BLOCH**

**L**LEFTY FEEP slumped into his seat across my table and beckoned to a waiter.

"Bring me a glass of water and a toothpick," he ordered. "And kindly cut the point off the toothpick first, so I am not tempted to cut my throat."

I stared at Feep in astonishment.

"What's the matter, Lefty—aren't you eating any more?"

"Not any more than I can get," he muttered.

I searched his long morose face for a possible explanation. All I saw was eyebrows and a frown.

"You certainly look down in the mouth," I told him.

Lefty Feep sighed.

"Everything is down in the mouth with me, except food."

"Broke?"

He nodded.

"Yesterday I am the richest man in the world. Today I am a bum."

"Why should today be an exception?" I asked, but under my breath. He didn't hear me.

"Yes, yesterday I sits at the Ritz. Today I mutter in the gutter. I am all set to go over the hill to the poorhouse, only I am too weak to climb hills."

I patted him on the shoulder to cheer him up. Then I patted him in the face with a roll. This did the trick. His mouth opened gratefully, and the roll disappeared. Also his frown.

"Don't take it so hard," I consoled him. "After all, money isn't everything. All that glitters is not gold."

The frown came back.

"Gold!" rasped Lefty Feep. "Please do not exclaim the name of same. Do not meddle with that metal."

"Why, what's wrong with that?"

"Everything. It is gold which causes all my troubles. In fact, I go from a gold rush to a bum's rush all in one day."

The waiter returned with the water and toothpick. Feep gargled noisily, then balanced the toothpick on the end of his nose in a wistful fashion.

"I still don't understand," I mused. "Why this dislike of gold?"

"It is very hard for me to talk about it," Feep sighed.

"All right, then. I'll change the subject."

A gleam entered Feep's eye. He began to breathe heavily as he rose and grasped my shoulders.

"But if you insist," he said, "I will spill the story to you."

"Oh, I don't insist at all—"

"You are forcing it out of me," Lefty Feep accused. "So you ask for it, so you'll get it."

Forcing me back in my seat with a half-nelson, Feep arranged my right ear for a target, aimed his mouth, opened, and fired.

And I got it.

\* \* \*

AS YOU know, I am the kind of personality who likes to go places and do people. It is very difficult to get me embarrassed.

But the other day I wake up and find myself embarrassed, in the worst way—financially. I am caught with my pants-pockets down. I am not only broke, but fractured.

You see, a couple weeks ago a medico looks me over and advises me to go off to a summer resort hotel for change and rest.

Well, the bellboys get the change, and the hotel gets the rest.

So there I am, flatter than last night's beer.

To make it worse, I am all tangled up with a very neat little number name of Sweetheart Singer. I do not know how she gets such an unusual name, but that is what the Navy calls her.

Do not get the wrong idea, now. Sweetheart is really a very intellectual type of ginch. She is very fond of etchings—particularly the kind the Government puts out on \$20 hills. So you see I am now mixed up in what you call a love triangle—I love Sweetheart, and Sweetheart loves money.

And here I am, dead broke. In order not to be heart-broke also, it is necessary for me to lay my pinkies on some coin, but swiftly. In fact, I have a weighty date this very evening. But the way it stands, I do not possess enough cash to rent a telephone booth.

So to make a long story wrong, there is only one thing for me to do. I hop back to town and pay a visit to Out-Of-Business Oscar.

This Out-of-Business Oscar, you may recall, is a loveable old cutthroat who runs a combination auction mart and hock shop where I once purchase



a rug. He is called Out-of-Business Oscar because he is always advertising a close-out sale. Although the only thing Oscar ever closes is his fist—over money.

Even so, Oscar and I are friends of many years' standing—principally me standing in front of him trying to get two or three bucks when I pawn my watch. Getting dough out of Oscar is like trying to squeeze tears out of a landlord.

Still, today I know this is the only chance I have of raising a few chips to take Sweetheart out on, so I amble down to Oscar's store and unbuckle my watch chain before I go in. I also take off my rings, my cuff-links, and tie pin. This ought to get me at least a fiver, I figure. But just to make sure, I bring along a small hammer—in case he makes me knock the fillings out of my teeth.

When I get up to the doorway of the hock shop I see a big sign outside:

**OUR LEASE EXPIRES!**

**GET YOUR BARGAINS—IT'S OUR FUNERAL!**

**ATTEND THE BIG PRICE MASSACRE!**

So I know business is still going on as usual. And I walk inside.

**T**HE place looks empty. It is very dark, and there does not seem to be anybody around. I stand there for a minute, and all at once I hear a voice gasping behind my back.

"Turn around and let me look at you—at last, at last, somebody to talk to. Speak to me!"

It is Oscar, of course. He rushes up to me and grabs my hand, pumping it like he was running a meat-grinder

and expected hamburgers to drop out from under my arm.

"You don't know what a pleasure this is," he wails. "Nobody comes into this joint for an entire week. It is a week since I see a human face."

Then he recognizes me and frowns.

"Of course I do not exactly feel that I see a human face yet when I look at yours."

I choose to ignore this remark.

"Speak up," he says. "What brings you here?"

"A bicycle," I tell him.

"I mean, what's on your mind?"

"Hair-restorer, mostly," I confess.

"What I am mainly interested in is raising a couple guilders on these family jewels of mine."

"You wish to hock this junk, in other words?" he says.

"I do not care for your other words, but that is the idea."

"It is a good idea," says Oscar.

"But it will not work. Because I have not more and not less than no money. Here," he says, "I will prove it to you." And he steps over to the cash-register and rings it open. Something half-flies out of it and then falls back.

"See?" Oscar shrugs. "A moth. And it is so starved, it is too weak to even fly. Around here is strictly from hunger."

"What's the matter?" I ask, very mystified.

Oscar sighs and shrugs some more.

"I don't know, Lefty. I can't understand it. This week is the most baffling one I ever lived through."

"On Monday I start out as usual with a big sign. **PRICES SLASHED TO RIBBONS**. Nobody comes in. So on Tuesday I put up my bigger sign. **PRICES CUT TO BITS**. Still nobody enters. On Wednesday I hang out the sign that reads, **PRICES TORN TO PIECES—COME IN BEFORE THE**

**BARGAINS BLEED TO DEATH!**  
And nothing doing.

"On Thursday I am so burned up I put out the sign for **FIRE SALE**. Nobody shows up—not even the Fire Department.

"Today I got all the signs up, but they are staying away from me in droves. I am about as popular as leprosy. Nobody wants to hock anything and nobody wants to buy anything. Too much prosperity. If it keeps up, I am ruined."

**O**SCAR rubs his bald noggin until it begins to shine like a street lamp.

"Maybe you got a few suggestions to help me with?" he asks. "I will appreciate same, Lefty."

I hesitate. It is a terrible thing to even think of, but I can see no way out of it in such a case. So I let my voice sink very low and try to keep it from trembling.

"Well, Oscar—there is only one thing left to do. You'll have to get out the hook."

"The hook?"

"Yes. That's all you got left."

"You really think so?"

"I'm afraid that's all."

"All right."

Oscar sighs and creeps behind the counter. He stoops down very carefully and pulls out a long iron pole with a scythe on the end of it. It looks very mean indeed.

He tries not to look at me while he creeps over to the door. He is ashamed, but he is still an old master when he goes to work, so I watch him carefully.

Oscar half-opens the door. He sticks his bald noggin out and squints up and down the street. His mustache bristles with anticipation, and dried noodle soup.

Then he hears it. Footsteps from the left, coming down the street.

Oscar sticks his head out further and frowns when a pair of socks hanging in the doorway hits him a mildewed blow in the face. He draws the hook up and begins to slide one end of the pole out of the door.

"Shhh! I think I hear a fink approaching now," he whispers.

Now Oscar is not a sports lover, and he does not care for fishing—even though the river runs right in back of his shop. But I can learn more about fishing by watching him land a customer than old Izaak Walton could ever teach me.

So I watch this fink coming down the street. He is a little old dried-up guy with a face like a prune that wears glasses. He walks along very swift, and Oscar waits from behind the doorway playing his hook over the sidewalk down low.

All at once the old bird is just ready to pass the door. Oscar jerks the hook up very sharp and trips the guy. Then he digs the hook into his belt, very careful, and plays him from left to right across the sidewalk. Oscar now braces his feet against the threshold and pulls his victim in. The old guy flies across the floor of the shop, and Oscar jumps right behind him and locks the door.

Then he turns to face the old huzard with a smile—because he is now a legitimate customer.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asks.

"Where am I—hey—what's the idea—ouch!" wails the little old bird, trying to get up off the floor.

**O**SCAR promptly taps him over the temple with a rare old New Jersey Ming vase. And the customer promptly falls down again.

Oscar turns to me.

"I am sorry, but I learn from experience this is the best way to make such a customer forget exactly how he happens to come in here."

Then he very carefully gets a glass of water and revives the little oldy. He opens his eyes and sits up.

"Nasty fall you just had, buddy," he remarks.

"Fall?" squeaks the customer.

"Sure—remember? You fall down and pass out just in front of my store. And say, that's lucky for you—because of the way you rip and ruin your clothes when you fall."

Then Oscar whips into his old routine. He runs behind the counters and begins to grab at his stock of flour sacks, mumbling to himself.

"New coat—the old one is torn—let's see, I got something handy and dandy here, just imported from the Bronx. And a new hat now—the old one is busted, and anyway you must just come from walking near a pigeon loft—here's a beautiful homburg from Hamburg—only \$1.88, costs me \$2.00, but it's yours for \$1.00, I make it up by saving string—a new tie instead of that greasy hunk of rope you're choking yourself with—aha—"

He races back to where the guy stands, bewildered, and begins to tear off his vest and coat. Then he rips his shirt, and replaces all the old clothes with stuff from the shop. The little old fink stands there in a cloud of dust while Oscar pats the new clothing into shape.

"Pity you ain't taller," says Oscar, throwing on a size 42 vest. "But you're young—you'll grow yet."

Then he grabs the trousers.

"You must have ripped these when you fell," he comments, showing the guy the place where he was grabbed by the hook. "Well, don't worry, I've got a pair of leg-tapestries here that

will give you legs like a chorus queen."

He jams a pair of pants over the scrawny legs, thrusts a cane into the guy's hand, and plunges a tie-pin into his neck. Then he steps back and registers ecstasy.

"Marvelous!" he croons. "You look just like a page torn out of *Esquire*."

WHAT he looks like certainly would be torn out of any magazine, quick, by whoever would see it. But this is all part of Oscar's song and dance.

"Now let's see," he mumbles. "That's \$1.49 and \$2.76 and \$7.63 and \$9.27 and \$3.04 and \$.18 for Social Security, and \$.05 for the glass of water I revive you with. Comes to a grand total of not more and not less than \$43.77 you owe me."

The little old customer looks bewildered.

"But I have no money," he says. "I'm sure I'm grateful to you for taking care of me, and getting me all fixed up with these splendid new clothes. But I'm not in a position to reimburse you. Ouch!"

He makes the last remark because of Oscar the Tiger, who is already snarling at him and clawing off his clothes in one furious leap.

"Wait," pleads the customer. "I can pay later—soon."

"Later!"

Oscar rips off his tie.

"Soon!"

He tears the shirt open.

"Pay me later, eh?"

He reefs the trousers.

"A wise guy! Huh!"

Off goes belt and socks.

"But," pants the old bird, trying to resist while he is whirling around in the air like a pinwheel, "I am an inventor, you see, and for the past year I've been working. Ouch! And I am

just on my way to the Patent Office today to get it registered and I am sure it will make me a lot of money."

"Money?" Oscar pauses, clutching the trousers. "What kind of invention you got, Buddy?"

The little old guy strikes a pose in his underwear.

"Well, sir, I'm glad you ask me that. Most people just laugh at me when I mention it. They think I'm crazy. But just yesterday I terminate my experiments and complete the invention of what I call the Midascope."

"Midascope?"

"Simple. Named after Midas, the king of the well-known legend.

"The bozo with the golden touch?"

"Exactly."

"I don't get it."

"My invention is a super-reagent which has the property of turning all inanimate matter into gold."

"You mean you could turn wood into gold, for example? Like that King Midas did in the story by touching it?"

"Definitely. Hence the name. However, there is nothing supernatural about my discovery. Supernormal, perhaps, yes. But this does not operate by touch—it consists of a ray. A simple ray, which, if directed properly at an object, will transmute its atomic components into the structural equivalency of gold."

"Cut the double-talk," Oscar tells him. Then he turns to me. "What do you say, Lefty? I think you better call the zoo and tell them one of their squirrels got out of his cage."

"You mean to infer I am demented?" hollers the old bird.

"Not at all. I think you're nuts," Oscar replies.

"Then you'd better take a look."

**H**E STOOPS down and fumbles in his old discarded coat. Then he

pulls out a small metal tube that looks like a flashlight. There is a cap over the end.

"By removing this cap the ray is released," he says, smirking.

"Oh, yeah?" I put in my two cents worth. "Then how come the cap does not turn to gold?"

"Because it is made out of a metal specially treated to resist the action of transmutation," says the guy, going back into his scientific double-talk. "But take the cap off and you get gold right away wherever you point the ray."

Oscar steps up and yanks the cylinder out of the old bird's mitts.

"Looks like a fake to me," he yaps. "I bet if I open it up and look in, I get a black eye—like those ones with the bula dancer's picture inside."

The small article sniffs and looks very haughty.

"There is no trickery involved, gentlemen," he says. "This represents my life-work. I guarantee its genuineness. To prove it, I will allow you to point the ray at whatever article you may choose in this shop."

"Nothing doing, buddy," says Oscar. "How do I know it ain't one of these disintegrator-rays like you read about? Blow my furniture or clothes to bits."

I personally do not see where this will be such a great loss, considering the quality of Oscar's furniture and clothing stock, but I keep still.

"Wait a minute," Oscar says. "I will step outside. There is a fruit store right across the street, and I will get hold of something to experiment on."

So he ducks off and comes back in about a minute with something in his hand. A banana.

"Here we are," he says. "Now, buddy, you turn on this thing and let's see you coin some gold."

The little stranger takes the cylinder

and holds it in his hand. He sets the banana down on the counter, then looks at it. He smiles. All at once he pulls the cap off his cylinder and points it at the monkey-cigar.

Nothing happens.

No light shines out. Nothing explodes. The little fink just waves the cylinder at the banana, that's all.

"Fake!" sneers Oscar.

The banana lies there on the counter, and Oscar snatches it up in disgust. All at once he stands frozen with the banana in his hand.

"It feels different," he mutters. "Heavier."

I take a good look. The banana is still yellow, but it is *shining*. Shining like gold!

"It is gold!" yells Oscar. "Solid gold!"

HE BEGINS to dance up and down, waving the jungle pigs-knuckle in the air.

"It works, you see? It really works!" he shouts.

I grab at the banana. Sure enough, it is heavy metal now. I can't peel it. The whole thing is a golden lump.

"Now what do we do?" I ask.

"What do we do?" echoes Oscar, staring at the banana. "What do we do? Why—we just run right over to that fruit store again and bring back a watermelon!"

I do not wish to go into details about the next hour we spend. Oscar does bring back a watermelon, and the stranger does turn it to gold with his cylinder. Then we sort of go gold-bugs, I guess.

Because we start to turn the junk in the store to gold. We wave the cylinder at the stuff on the counters and on the shelves. We get golden golf-clubs and tennis rackets, gold fountain pens, vases, pictures, microscopes,

candid cameras. We even get gold leaf pages in the books when we point the cylinder at them. It is all like one grand and glorious bingo game where we always hold the winning corn. Nothing is impossible. An hour ago we are lower than a worm's toenails and now we are kicking around the pot at the end of the rainhow. No wonder we do not have much of the old self-control.

Finally Oscar climbs up on a golden step-ladder and points the cylinder at the stuffed moose-head hanging over the door. He looks at the golden moose for a minute and then he stops and frowns. He climbs down slowly.

"Why are you rubbing your forehead?" I ask.

"Because a thought hits me."

"You should have concussion of the brain," I remark, but he ignores this. He points at me and the little inventor.

"We are wasting our time," he says.

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning just this—why should we hang around here trying to turn this petty stuff into carats? We can go out and really coin money with this thing.

"Why not turn it on the sidewalks, on the trees, on the buildings? Imagine owning a whole skyscraper of gold! A 22-carat Empire State Building? Or a golden Subway? I can picture Radio City—"

"Stop!" says the little old fink, striking another pose in his long underwear. "You talk like a fool."

"I do, eh?"

"Certainly. Allow me to remind you of a few elementary truths. To begin with, there's a government law making it impossible for anyone to own more than \$100 in raw gold."

"'Laws,' he says!" snorts Oscar.

"VERY well, then," continues the small inventor. "If you do not

respect government laws, perhaps the laws of economics will prove more stringent.

"Don't you realize that if you run around indiscriminately transforming everything into gold, that gold will lose its value? Don't you understand that if you create too much gold it will become common and therefore worthless?"

"I am willing to risk it," Oscar sneers.

"Well I'm not," the stranger snaps. "As I say, I am on my way to the Patent Office with this working model. I intend to register it and present the formulae involved to our government; to keep, not to use. In times of need, the cylinder can be employed. But it must be worked with discretion.

"I can see that common men cannot be entrusted with such great power. You, my friend, have already bruised your knees bowing down to the Golden Calf. It is an object lesson to prove mankind is not yet ready for easy riches."

I get the little fink's point all right, but Oscar grunts.

"Get off your soap-box and come down to earth," he says. "Here we got a fortune in our grasp and you want to give it away."

"We?" says the inventor. "It's *my* cylinder. I demand that you return it to me at once so that I may proceed on my errand to the Patent Office."

"Cylinders you want?" Oscar sneers. "Nuts you get!"

This is a very discourteous statement, and it seems to make the little guy quite angry, because he suddenly makes a dive for Oscar and tries to grab the cylinder out of his hand.

There is quite a lusty scuffle, and all in a moment the two of them are rolling on the floor.

I look on, very shocked. Because I

would not roll on a floor as dirty as Oscar's for all the gold in the world. Not even dice would I roll.

But in a minute I am even more shocked. Oscar jumps up on his feet and grabs the cylinder. The little old guy starts to dive for him, with his underwear flapping in the breeze. And all at once Oscar whips the cap off the cylinder and points it—right at the inventor's legs and feet.

There is a hideous scream. Then, an awful thump.

The little guy stops short and stares down at his waist. He is still screaming, but every time he tries to take a step the thumps drown him out.

Because Oscar has turned the bottom half of his underwear to solid gold!

"I can't move," wails the inventor fink. "It's too heavy!"

"Good," Oscar grunts, putting the cylinder back on the counter.

"GET me out of here," yells the little stranger. "The underwear is frozen tight to me. Even the buttons are solid, and the buttonholes. Get a can-opener or a pick-axe and chip me loose!"

"You mean I should go to work on you like a miner?" asks Oscar. "Not on your life. Seeing how you cannot move, I am going to carry you into the back room and let you cool off for a while. Do not make any noise, or I will turn the rest of your longie to gold and you will be a statue from the neck down."

"What are you going to do with me?" quivers the little old guy.

"Nothing, if you are a good boy. I will let you stay in the back room and see that you are fed and that nobody melts you down into wedding rings. Meanwhile I will make use of your little invention—very good use."

While he is talking, Oscar is shoving

the half-man, half-statue back of the counter to the back room overlooking the river.

It all happens so fast I scarcely make up my mind. And just as I do make it up, Oscar comes back and raps me on the knuckles. So I drop the cylinder back on the counter again.

"Trying to put the snatch on it, eh?" he grates.

"But—"

"I can't trust you either, can I, Feep?" he says. "Maybe I better tie you up, too. In a little burlap bag. Then I can turn the bag into gold and toss you into the river. You always say you want a luxurious funeral."

"Honest, I'm not going to steal the cylinder."

"I'll say you're not," Oscar tells me. "And you're not going to say anything about our inventor friend, either. You are going to be very quiet while I figure out what I want to do with this little money-maker."

So while Oscar sits there trying to figure out what to do with his little money-maker, I am sitting there trying to figure out what to do with my little money-spender.

Because I do not forget that I have a date with Sweetheart Singer this evening, and I still do not raise any money to raise whoopee on.

I do not see which way to turn, but if it is any consolation, neither does Oscar. He sits there grumbling to himself under his breath, thinking up scheme after scheme. But always something is wrong.

"What if I do turn Sidewalks into gold," he says. "I don't own the sidewalks. Also, the Empire State Building is out—why should I make money for Al Smith? Of course, I already got a fortune right here in the store, but I must figure out a way to get more. I need a lot of stuff I can turn into gold."

EVERY time he makes a remark Oscar rubs his bald spot. And he makes so many remarks I figure he will wear himself down until he has nothing above the forehead in a little while. But he is so greedy that no scheme he thinks of will satisfy him.

All at once he sighs and gets up.

"Well, maybe I better think some more," he yawns. "After all, there is plenty of time. The cylinder will not run away."

"That is right," I say.

"Oh, I forget!" he shouts. "Quick, I must lock up the store! With all this gold lying around I don't want any customers wandering in."

He races to the door, pausing only to turn the hook into gold and then going on his merry way.

"Better close the awnings, too," he decides. "Don't want anybody looking in through the windows tonight."

"I'll do it," I volunteer.

"Good."

So I step outside while Oscar waits.

When I skid past the door I do not hoist any awnings. I merely hoist my coat tails and race away down the street.

Because Oscar is right when he says the cylinder will not run away. He just does not figure that I will run away, and that I will take the cylinder with me.

Which I do, lifting the thing off the counter just before I go out, when his back is turned.

So now I make very fleet with the feet, and behind me I hear Oscar yelling, "Stop, thief, stop thief!" at the top of his voice.

Only this does not do any good. Because on such a street as the one where his store is, this command can apply to almost anyone passing by.

I just keep running, holding the cylinder under my coat, and I do not pause

until I dash into the lobby of Sweetheart's apartment building.

It is already dark, and I do not wish to be late for my date. My heart is going like an overtime shift in a defense plant, but it pounds even faster when I walk up to Sweetheart's door. Because I am really gooney for this ginch. I got no more chance when I get near her than a hot marshmallow has around a Girl Scout.

I hold the cylinder very tight under my coat when I step up and ring the bell.

Already I am making plans. I will tell her about this cylinder and it will make her very happy and then perhaps we will get ourselves wedlocked. And this suits me fine. Some people do not approve of such an idea, because they say this Sweetheart is too mercenary. Me, I know different. She is not mercenary at all—only greedy.

And I figure the cylinder will take care of that. I mean to return it to the inventor, naturally, but I merely need to use it tonight.

So I have my little act all prepared. When the door opens I strike a pose with my arms stretched out and I whisper, "Sweetheart!"

"Ain't youse a little bold, stranger?" says a deep voice.

**TO MAKE** a long story embarrassing, it is not Sweetheart at all in the doorway, but a big lug.

I look up into a bristly red beard. Then I look further up into a big red mouth and a bigger red nose, and then I look way up into little red eyes.

This is quite a squint, because the lug in the doorway is over six feet tall in his stocking feet. Which is probably the way they measure him, because he does not look like the kind of personality who ever wears shoes.

"Was youse looking for somebody?"

the lug suggests. "Or maybe just for a sock in the jaw?"

I stand there figuring out what to do. The way I see it, the only chance I have of punching him in the nose is to jump up in the air and hit it with the top of my head.

Just then Sweetheart sticks her attractive puss around the doorway.

"Oh, hello Lefty," she says. Then she turns to the lug. "Will you excuse me a minute?" she coos, very sweet. And steps out in the hall with me, shutting the door behind her.

"I'm sorry, Lefty," she tells me. "I forget all about our little date for this evening. I am going out with this gentleman friend of mine from Alaska."

"You mean that polar bear with the henna fur?" I snap.

"Don't talk that way," she pouts. "He is none other than the famous Klondike Ike. He is a very wealthy prospector."

"Prospector, eh?" I mention, in a sarcastic manner. "What does he own—a halitosis mine in Breath Valley?"

"He is rich," sniffs Sweetheart. "Why, he always carries a bag of raw gold dust around in his pocket."

"That's nothing," I tell her. "If it's gold you want, I am plenty dusty with it myself. I am so rich I am filthy."

She gives me a fishy stare.

"What are you trying to hand me, Lefty Feep? The only way you make money is by playing a slot machine—with a hammer."

"Give me five minutes," I yell. "Just five minutes. I'll be back here with more gold dust than this Eskimo Elmer of yours ever has."

"His name is Klondike Ike," Sweetheart says. "And yours is mud."

She slams the door on me.

**WELL**, I am far from discouraged. I run downstairs and into the



back yard of the apartment building. I find the janitor's shovel and a couple paper bags from the garbage incinerator. I fill the bags with dirt and get out the cylinder. I uncap it and point it at the dirt.

"Midascope, do your stuff," I whisper.

In thirty seconds I am puffing up the stairs again, lugging up two sacks filled with gold dust. I take out a couple nuggets and pound on the door.

Klondike Ike sticks his beard out.

"Oh it's you, is it?" he sneers. "What do you want—darling?" he says, in a very effeminate manner.

"I am a traveling dentist," I tell him, politely. "When you snarl at me, I see your teeth are decaying. I think they need some gold fillings."

Then I smash him one in the teeth with the nuggets. He looks very dented at my dentistry and slumps down on the floor. I march over him and into the apartment.

Sweetheart just stares at me when I pour the bags out over the carpet.

"See what I mean?" I tell her.

"Oh Lefty, darling, you're so rich—I mean, wonderful," she sighs, falling into my arms.

"What about our date?" I ask her, coming up for air a few minutes later.

"Let's go," she murmurs. "Oh honey, I never could resist a wealthy—a masterful man."

So she puts on her hat and face over at the mirror and steps out the door.

"Wait a minute," I call to her. "I want to wash up."

Saying which, I close the door and get to work. I figure on one grand gesture. I will turn on the cylinder all over her apartment. I will transform the floor, the walls, the furniture, everything into solid gold. Then when we come back later in the evening she will really see what I can do. This will

certainly put my number up on her hit parade.

So I let fly with the Midascope, flashing it around like I was spraying with a Flit gun. In a minute I am standing dazzled. My eyes hurt. Everything sparkles and glitters and I am looking at a fairy tale come to life. Yellow, tawny, shining gold surrounds me on all sides. The place looks like Morgenthau's delight.

Then I tiptoe out and lock the door. Sweetheart is waiting for me in the hall and we go downstairs. On the way down I pick up another bag of gold dust I leave cached in the hallway. We are all set.

WELL, I am just the kind of a personality to entertain a gold-digger this evening.

"Where shall we go?" Sweetheart asks.

"Why, the Ritz, of course," I tell her. And we do, in a taxi. When we get out I do not pay the driver, but hand him the bag of gold instead.

"Jeez," the cabby whispers. "There must be a fortune here, mister."

"Sure," I remark. "Almost enough to buy yourself a new tire."

And we swoop into the Ritz. On the way I duck off at the cloakroom until I find one of those big urns with the sand in it they use for throwing cigarette butts in. I scoop out sand, turn on the Midascope, and come back with pockets bulging from still more gold dust.

We go in and order the best—meaning plenty of champagne. Because I have just the appetite to drink a hearty meal.

All of this makes Sweetheart almost hysterical.

"I don't understand it at all, Lefty," she keeps saying. "Where did all this money come from?"

I just look mysterious. But after two quarts of the champagne, maybe I only look confused.

Anyway, she will not rest until she gets the story out of me. She keeps coaxing me all the time we are dancing, and she is some coxer.

"You must tell me, darling," she sighs. All at once her eyes get very soft and tender. "I know—my great big wonderful man holds up a hank."

"Guess again. Gold is where you find it," I quote.

Her eyes get still more tender. She is wild about me.

"Maybe you kill a tax collector?" she breathes, sweetly.

"No. You're still cold."

This is a lie. Sweetheart is a lot of things, but she is not cold.

"Do you own a gold mine?"

"Uh-uh."

"Maybe you got a lot of sugar-rationing cards."

I lead her back to the table.

"I hate to disappoint you, Sweetheart," I say. "But I do not do anything dishonest to get this stack of chips. I just discover I am one of the long-lost Gold Dust Twins."

"They're black," she pouts. "And you are kidding me."

But she cannot pump the secret out of me. All she can do is pump champagne into me.

After we leave the Ritz—where I leave a cupful of dust to tip the waiter with—we go on to a couple of other hot spots. In fact, by midnight we see more joints than a chiropractor.

And all the while Sweetheart is itching to discover my secret. I keep stepping out for a minute on her to find some more sand or dirt to make dust out of with the Midascope—looking for rubber plants or cuspidors or sawdust—and every time I come back with a fresh batch she stares again. The

Midascope cylinder is hot from being used so much. And Sweetheart isn't much cooler.

**F**INALLY, in our fifth joint and our sixth quart of champagne, I pop another bottle and the question.

"Sweetheart," I say, romantically, "Let's you and me try a little wedded blitz."

"Are you proposing matrimony?"

"Matrimony hell—let's get married!" I snap.

She turns her big baby blue eyes up at me.

"Lefty," she says, "I think you are the one I am always waiting for. You are kind, and generous, and brave, and generous, and strong, and generous, and cultured, and—well, generous."

"I am glad you see it this way," I tell her. "Personally, I always look for a girl who agrees with me. And if you think I'm wonderful, I agree with you. So what are we waiting for?"

"Just one thing, darling," she tells me. "We must have no secrets between us. You must explain where it is you get all this gold from."

"All right," I say. The champagne is bubbling around in my head, and I figure it will not hurt to tell her.

So we leave this last dump and taxi home, and in the cab I explain the whole picture to her. Or at least part of it. I tell her I have this magic gimmick that turns anything I want into gold. And I also tell her that I have a little surprise waiting for her when she gets home.

"How wonderful you are," she says, softly. "To think that I am marrying a man with the Golden Touch! I hope we spend money—I mean, many—years together."

Right then and there I begin to feel maybe I am making a mistake.

I also begin to feel her fingers dig-

ging into my pocket and trying to snatch the cylinder.

I slap her very gently on the nose, but I am really just a wee bit burned up. She may not make such a perfect wife after all, I figure—like the other three I marry at one time or another.

In fact, from the way she speaks, she does not want a man at all. She would be happier with a cash register.

**B**UT it is too late now. I ask her, and a gentleman cannot back down. Without being sued for breach of promise, that is.

So I decide to make the best of it. We get up to the apartment door and she can't wait to get inside and see the surprise I promise her.

She runs up the stairs ahead of me, and I lurch behind. I hear her open the door and scurry in. Then I hear her give a screech.

"She must be plenty surprised," I figure.

But she is not as surprised as I am a minute later.

That is when she comes out just when I get to the head of the stairs. On her face is a very nasty look, and in her hand is a lead bookend.

The bookend does not stay in her hand long. It comes right down on my skull.

"Take that!" she shrieks. "You four-flushing poney! You and your fake gold bricks!"

I keep staring at the bookend. Only a couple hours ago I turn it into gold. Now it is lead—

"My whole apartment," she screams. "Turned to lead—everything turned to lead! You—you counterfeiter!"

She catches me one across the side of the old noggin that spins me backward down the stairs.

When I get to the bottom I do not stop. I just keep right on running.

All the way to Out-Of-Business Oscar's I am trying to puzzle it out in my aching orange. First gold and then lead—is something wrong?

Oscar and the little inventor fink are the only ones who can tell me. That is why I streak for the store.

When I get there the joint is still lighted behind the drawn awnings and shades. I bang on the door.

Oscar opens it.

"Something terrible happens," I yell. "I got to tell you—"

He glares and drags me inside by the scruff of the neck. I have a very tender scruff, too.

"You want to tell me?" he hollers. "Something terrible happens to *you*? Look at what happens to *me*!"

I look. I stare straight up into a stuffed moose head of solid lead. I look around at the lead clothing, the lead microscopes, the lead counters. Everything that the Midascope turns to gold is lead now. Dirty grey lead.

**I**T HAPPENS an hour ago," Oscar groans. "The gold just seems to fade away and there is nothing but lead all over."

He picks up the lead banana from the counter and throws it on the floor in a rage. He kicks out at the lead watermelon and then yells.

For the next minute all he can say is ouch.

"What about the inventor fink?" I ask.

"He is locked up in the back room," Oscar reminds me.

"Well, let's tell him—he ought to know what's wrong."

"So quiet back there I figure he goes to sleep," Oscar says. "But you're right. He might know what the trouble is."

We go up to the door and knock. There is no sound.

"Come on in there," Oscar hollers. "Wake up."

"What is it?" asks the little stranger from behind the door.

"Something terrible happens to your Midascope. The stuff it turns to gold is all changing to lead now."

"Not really?"

"Absolutely."

All at once we hear a funny sound.

It is the little inventor fink, laughing. Laughing!

"I am glad," he chuckles. "Something must be wrong with my discovery after all. And I am glad! Because your greedy behavior proves that the world isn't ready for such a miracle yet at all. I'm glad I make this failure."

"But now I must be leaving you—"

The voice stops.

"What does he mean?" Oscar yells.

"How can he leave us?"

"The window in the room," I pant.

"It opens on the river."

"But his heavy underwear is too heavy—" Oscar begins. I shake my head.

"Listen to that."

There is an awful bumping sound.

Oscar unlocks the door, throws it open.

There is the little inventor guy, balanced across the window-sill. He is ready to dive out. We stare at the heavy bottoms of his underwear.

"Hey—wait—don't jump—you can't!" we scream.

But the little inventor fink jumps. He tips forward, topples over, and disappears.

There is a terrific splash from below.

Oscar grabs the Midascope from my hand and runs to the window. "Come back here!" he shouts, hurling the cylinder out into the river.

"Missed him," he says. "Oh well—he's done for."

"It's suicide, swimming with that

gold on him from the waist down," I admit.

"Gold? What gold? It changes, remember," Oscar reminds me. "He probably drowns because of all the lead in his pants."

\* \* \*

LEFTY FEEP cleared his throat in order to push another one of my rolls down it.

"So that's what you mean by being rich yesterday and poor today," I mused.

"Tragic, isn't it?"

"Very. I suppose Oscar is pretty mad at you for all this?"

"Why should he be?" Feep asked.

"The cylinder turns out to be no good, so he doesn't lose anything. The junk in his store he can't sell, and now that it's turned to lead he can maybe get rid of it to the army for bullets. So he is all right.

"As for me, I get out of this mess with Sweetheart, so I am not behind on the deal."

"Then everything worked out all right."

"Well, yes and no. Oscar is sore about just one thing. You see, this inventor fink is screwy when he says his Midascope turns stuff to gold. And he is also wrong about one other point—when he claims the cylinder does not work on flesh."

"Meaning what?"

"It's this way. Oscar is pretty blue last night when it's all finished. He asks me what he's going to eat the next day without any money.

"So I tell him to hang a line out of his window and catch some perch from the river. He does, and that is why he is mad."

"How so?"

"Because he hangs his line in the spot where he throws the cylinder after

the inventor. And instead of perch, he gets a string of nice, cute little goldfish."

I smiled.

"Too bad. But after all, he could still eat them, I suppose."

Feep frowned.

"That's what I tell him. And he does eat them. So now, you see, he's in the hospital."

"What's the matter?"

"Lead poisoning," said Lefty Feep.

## LATEST FROM THE SCIENCE FRONT

By WILLIS WHITE

### New Inventions and scientific discoveries which are now making their bow in public

#### GLUE FROM MILK

**D**ID you enjoy your glass of milk for lunch today? Well, it may interest you to know that beside being good for your thirst and health, milk can be used to produce a very excellent glue.

The thick substance found in some milk is called casein, which is the base of casein glue. The glue was first produced during the first World War when it was discovered that it would hold wood together in wet places.

Airplane manufacturers quickly turned to using casein glue when they saw how effective it was in holding together layers of thin plywood with the grain cross-crossed. The glued wood could withstand the jarring of engines, wrenching caused by the wind, impacts from landings and waves, and even the dampness of fog and the heat of the tropics.

All it takes to produce this adhesive is to add water to casein glue which is produced as a white powder.

\* \* \*

#### A NEW USE FOR PLASTICS

**C**HALK up another use for plastics now that it is going to replace the brass that holds the eraser on your lead pencil.

One pound of plastic can do the work of two pounds of brass and the total savings in the U. S. alone will amount to 150,000 pounds of brass each year.

\* \* \*

#### A DIAL SYSTEM "HEADACHE" IS CURED

**O**NE of the problems that arose when the dial system of telephoning was introduced was how to notify the dialer that he had dialed a number which did not exist.

Many signals were tried but they were so similar to other signals used that the dialer would often hold up the circuit for too long a period before he realized his error.

Research in the Bell Laboratories finally pro-

duced a signal that sounds like a siren which rises and falls at half-second intervals. This "no-such-number" signal has met with great success in not only cutting down the circuit holding time, but also in causing the dialer to call the correct number on the second try.

\* \* \*

#### RESEARCH PAYS

**F**OR many years, millions of dollars worth of oranges were allowed to rot in California and Florida because, although ripe, they were still green-colored instead of a full yellow.

After some experimentation, it was discovered that treating these oranges with ethylene gas would give them a natural yellow color. The entire cost of the research to develop this method was a little over \$4,000 but estimates of the market value of the oranges saved by the method is over \$8,000,000 for Florida and California combined says Dr. Henry G. Knight, Chief of the Bureau of Agricultural Chemistry and Engineering.

\* \* \*

#### CLOTH FROM SEAWEED

**L**ATEST reports show that the British have been successfully experimenting with producing synthetic textiles from ordinary seaweed. About twenty to thirty per cent of seaweed consists of alginic acid which can be dissolved and spun in an acid solution through spinnerettes similar to those used for producing rayon.

The textiles thus produced were no good since they dissolved when washed in soap solutions. However, it was discovered that if the alginic acid was combined with some alginates, an inorganic material, they could produce a fiber that would resist alkalies. Reports say the material is non-inflammable. One of the tests was to soak the fabric in gasoline which was ignited. The gasoline was all burned away, while the fabric was unaffected. The material has good luster and strength and will cost less to produce than viscose rayon.

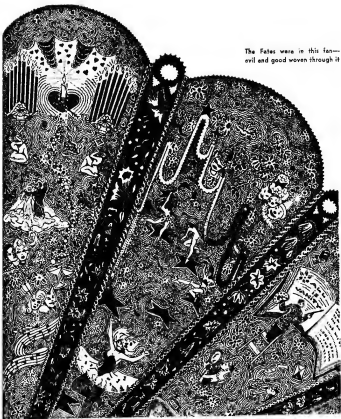
# TALU'S FAN



by JOHN YORK CABOT

Robert Weston's life became very interesting when he received the gift of a strangely evil but amazingly beautiful and cabalistic fan

The Fates were in this fan—  
evil and good woven through it



YOUNG ROBERT WESTON, eager and excited at his first taste of diplomatic service, arrived in Hong Kong very early in December of 1941. At the time of young Weston's arrival, that seething cauldron known in newspaper language as the "far eastern situation" had not quite bub-

bled over to scald an already badly burned world.

Fresh from that eastern seaboard college which so admirably trains young men for diplomatic service, Weston had the blond, athletic scrubbed appearance of a collegiate oarsman. He had, too, an amiable, disarming guile-

lessness about him which was evident in the candor of his clean blue eyes and the heartiness of his handshake.

He was the perfect man for the task which lay ahead of him; even though he hadn't the slightest idea of what it was all about.

His orders, which he was not permitted to open until his ship had left San Francisco, were extremely simple ones. They stated that he was to take residence in a certain Hong Kong hotel and spend his first week in that city as he pleased. By no means, his instructions stated, was he to communicate with his diplomatic superiors in Hong Kong until the end of his first week there.

Young Weston had read the orders, frowned briefly, then shrugged. With all the excitement in the air, he decided, they would probably have no time for him right off at the Hong Kong consulate. Too, perhaps they wanted him to spend the first week on his own so that he could acclimate himself comfortably to his new surroundings before settling down to work.

At any rate, he figured, it would be fun to have that week in which to prowl about on his own and observe first hand the mysteries and glamor of that legendary city. Hong Kong—the very color of the word itself thrilled him!

**I**N ONE respect concerning his orders, young Weston had been right. His immediate superiors on the diplomatic staff at Hong Kong were indeed extremely busy. One of the focal points of a seething international situation, they worked like madmen night and day. Red-eyed, yet not daring to tire, they drove themselves endlessly at the tremendous tasks which confronted them hourly.

But they were not too busy for Robert Weston. In fact, had it not

been for the task they'd already selected for him, they would have welcomed his addition to their overworked staff immediately on his arrival.

"It's best that we do it this way," Martin Holliday, gray-haired official of the staff told his trusted assistant. "Young Weston's casual arrival, his week without so much as coming within a mile of this office, and the fact that he will undoubtedly behave like a naive and wild-eyed tourist, will all serve to throw any suspicion away from him."

His assistant nodded at this.

"We've a man ready to send us word the instant young Weston checks in at his hotel," he said. "Do you think it wise that we keep someone detailed to watch him—just in case the youngster should wander into trouble?"

Martin Holliday shook his head wearily.

"No. We can't afford even to run that risk. Our men are all under careful watch. If it were known that one of them was keeping track of young Weston's movements the first week, Weston, too, would fall under suspicion. His value then would be utterly destroyed."

The assistant nodded again. "Now about that Washington cable," he began.

Holliday ran a tired hand through his gray hair, sighed, and rested fully twenty glorious seconds before driving himself back into the avalanche of work ahead . . .

**I**N ANOTHER section of the island metropolis, young Weston's arrival was also tensely expected. But the reasons behind this anticipation were somewhat conflicting with Martin Holliday's. The reasons were of quite immediate personal concern to a dapper, gold-toothed yellow complexioned little man with slanted eyes and sibilant



speech. His name was Mr. Shido, and the lithe, cat-like grace with which he strode back and forth in the woman's apartment, belied the brutality and treachery for which he had become notorious in certain Manchuko espionage assignments. Mr. Shido was in Hong Kong precisely because of matters concerning the arrival of young Robert Weston. It was his first assignment in this metropolis, and he was most eager to please the Son of Heaven by his handling of it.

"The moment the young American arrives at his hotel I will send you word," Mr. Shido told the woman. "Certain leaks in their stupid consular office lead me to believe his arrival will be of this afternoon."

The woman was blonde, and almost incredibly beautiful. Her skin was ivory tinted and her brown eyes not quite almond in their loveliness. She wore an occidental afternoon dress, the clinging lines of which did little to conceal the voluptuous promise of a god-moulded body. Asia had given to her all the exotic allure of sensual incense; Europe had lent an occidental piquancy, and the result of both had made her the most dangerous woman of all castes—the Eurasian tigress.

Mr. Shido paused in his pacing.

"Is it all quite clear, Talu?" he demanded.

Talu's graceful golden fingers lifted a long cigarette in a jade holder briefly to her lips. She caressed the filmy blue pattern of smoke she exhaled with rich, moist lips.

"It is all clear," she said. "Within eight hours of this young American's arrival I will have become acquainted with him." She smiled to herself at the verb she had chosen.

Mr. Shido sucked back his breath in the manner of his race.

"Good," he declared. "From that

moment we can make all plans in accordance with necessity." He strode to a teakwood table and picked up his panama hat. He paused at the door a moment before leaving, his slant eyes regarding the sensual allure of the woman reclining on the heavily cushioned divan.

"I think we shall have little trouble," he decided. "I will talk to you again tomorrow. *Sayroonerak.*"

"Goodbye," Talu said.

When he had gone, Talu lovingly lifted a small, exquisitely fashioned oriental fan from the low table beside the divan. Flicking it open, she gently swept it back and forth before her face. Such pigs, these little Japanese. But then, she shrugged mentally, they paid so handsomely for what they wanted . . .

THE well informed Mr. Shido had had been correct as to the time of young Weston's arrival. His boat docked that afternoon, and inside of an hour the young man was comfortably settled in his hotel quarters. And ironically enough, within five minutes of each other, both Martin Holliday's man and Mr. Shido's observer had communicated the fact of the arrival to their utterly alien employers.

Robert Weston was, of course, aware of neither interest in him. And had the communications been made under his very nose it is not likely that he would have noticed them. He was far too enthralled with this first taste of oriental glamor.

From the moment that his ship had docked and discharged him into the arms of the exotically reeking metropolis, Weston had moved like a man in a daze.

The dockside coolies, the shrieking vendors and beggars, the brown and olive and black-skinned parade of hu-

manity streaming everywhere around him, the chatter of a hundred dialects, a million voices, the parasols and pith helmets, the rickshaws and market spices—all these swam before his excited senses in dizzying panorama.

The hotel, too, from the moment young Weston entered its lobby, was like the setting for some tremendous international drama such as even Hollywood had never staged.

Uniformed Hong Kong Home Guards passed smartly attired British officers. Fashionable and alluring occidental women from every nation on the continent mingled and chatted with sloe-eyed oriental beauties of grace and charm and picturesqueness. Chinese and Japanese, Russians and Germans, Hindus and Mongols, English and American and French and Spanish. There was no race or creed or rank in the vast swarm of the earth's population not represented.

Quite possibly Robert Weston's gaze included Mr. Shido's brown-skinned informer and Martin Holliday's man. Certainly there was little in external visual stimulæ that missed his wide-eyed attention. Hong Kong—1941! It left him breathless.

In his room, Weston bathed and changed to fresh whites. And then he sat for a while with the drink he'd had sent up, thinking and marveling and trying to comprehend the vastness of this exciting new world in which he found himself.

There was no one he knew here. That is, no one with whom he could communicate under the orders he had received. But the realization that he would have this week alone only served to heighten his excitement and make him feel even more keenly the rich adventure of the explorations ahead of him.

It would be far better this way, he

decided. He would have the thrill that comes only in being completely on your own, unguided and unchaperoned in an exciting and alien world. Of course Weston had better than a standard guidebook knowledge of the city. His specialized training at college had included an intensive study, from maps and charts, of the geographical nature of every large city on the face of the earth.

But the geography and the descriptions in the text books had failed utterly to catch any of the incredibly exotic allure of the East. And just in these first few hours in Hong Kong, Weston was clearly able to see why mere words would never have sufficiently described the place.

After a hit, when Weston had finished his drink and his resavoring of his first taste of the orient, he began to think about suitable amusement for the evening.

In his mind he could count off the names of innumerable restaurants and cafés of which he had heard or been advised to try. But all of them, somehow, seemed to lack precisely the ingredients for what he wanted from his first night in Hong Kong.

He decided at last to let chance take his footsteps where it would. In that there would be more sport, and besides, some inner loathing made Weston rebel against acting strictly the guidebook tourist. He would not follow the beaten path; he would find, "discover" a place of his own . . .

TALU had chosen her wardrobe for that evening with care. With a picture of the young American in mind, she had been exacting in the gown she chose. And when finally she had dressed she was an exquisite ivory goddess, swathed in ermine-soft, white satin.

She waited then, until she received word of the young man's choice for a dining place. And then, smiling a little to herself at his callow brashness in selection, she rode by rickshaw to the place. It was rather a small, sidestreet cafe; none too respectable, almost within the shadow of the law.

Talu saw him almost immediately on entering. He was seated at a side table, reflectively sipping a tall drink, obviously waiting for his food and swallowing atmosphere in great wide-eyed gulps.

A waiter appeared, seemingly surprised at the sight of one so lovely as Talu gracing this nefarious establishment. She told him that she wished a booth, secluded, meanwhile observing the young American from the corner of her eye and making certain that he heard her request.

The waiter, after a single preliminary raising of eyebrows, bowed and smiled and turned to lead her toward the booths, which were just beyond the young American's table, curtained off by closely hung strings of gaily colored beads.

Talu was consummately unknowing when her fan slipped from the folds of her wrap and fell a few feet from the young American's table as she passed. She hesitated not an instant as she moved on behind the waiter, and even as she turned into the booth she heard the quick scraping of the young American's chair as he rose from the table to retrieve the fan. Talu was extremely experienced in these affairs.

She smiled to herself, then, giving the order for the drink she wanted to the waiter and telling him that she would order food after a few moments.

The waiter had scarcely left Talu's curtained booth, before the young American swept in past the beaded hangings holding her fan in his hands.

The expression on his face was one of slight embarrassment mingled with pure delight. And Talu knew from the moment she smiled up into those guileless, clean blue eyes that she would have little trouble with this one.

"Your fan," Robert Weston said, almost stammering. He colored, nevertheless unable to tear his eyes from her beauty. "I mean, pardon me, but you dropped this fan. It fell from your wrap." He paused, searching for words, and was unable to find them. For substitute, he grinned disarmingly and extended the fan in his hand.

Talu held his eyes with her own, yet made no effort to reach for the fan. It seemed to Weston that a section of eternity slipped by as he was held half hypnotized by that glance.

And then she smiled, a smile that was like nothing Weston had ever experienced before.

"Thank you," Talu said simply. "It was very kind of you to bring it to me." She reached for the fan.

Weston handed it to her.

"It is an extremely lovely thing," he said. "I couldn't help but notice it as I picked it up."

Talu flicked it open with a gesture of her graceful hand. She held it out to Weston.

"You may inspect it more thoroughly if you like," she told him. "There are many curious designs in its folds. It is quite old."

WESTON found it hard to keep his gaze on the exquisite oriental curio. He found himself wanting to repeat that long moment in which he had looked into the lovely creature's eyes. But he forced his attention to the many quaint designs on the fan.

"The characters and symbols here seem to represent many emotions," Weston said at last. "They are all

beautifully drawn."

"The fan was my mother's," Talu said truthfully enough. "She was Chinese. When she died—in Russia, some years ago—she left it to me. It has a curious history, and there is an ancient Chinese legend concerning it."

Then suddenly Talu seemed to be aware of the circumstances of Weston's presence for the first time since his entrance. At least the expression she donned for his benefit suggested her realization that a breach of formalities had been made.

She smiled politely, dismissingly, and reached for the fan.

"Thank you again," she said.

Weston colored, reacting as the girl had known he would.

"I—I'm Robert Weston," he blurted. "I'm an American. This is my first time, in fact my first night, in Hong Kong. I hope you wouldn't think me too rude if I asked if I might, might stay—to hear the legend of that fan," he concluded lamely.

Talu feigned surprise. Her eyebrows lifted, and then her expression softened. She smiled once more, holding his eyes again with her own glance.

"I think perhaps that once formalities are broken unconsciously they are broken lastingly. Yes, you may join me." She paused. "Perhaps you had better tell the waiter to send your food in here when it arrives. Sit down, my young American."

Robert Weston had regained some of his composure with the invitation, and he managed to seat himself across the table from the exotically beautiful Eurasian girl without any of the awkwardness that had marked his entrance.

"Hong Kong is a thrilling place," he murmured half audibly.

"What did you say?" Talu asked.

The waiter entered then, and with true oriental composure had Weston's

drink in his hand. He had brought it in from the table which the young man had occupied.

Weston broke into a grin.

"Well I'll be—," he began. Then he laughed. "How did he know I'd be here for the rest of the meal?"

Talu joined in his laughter.

"The oriental mind," she said, "is sometimes many jumps ahead of circumstances themselves." But while Weston bent his head in a search of his pocket for cigarettes, the glance Talu gave the imperturbably smiling waiter was venomous. The glance he returned was the consummately all-knowing glance of the East . . .

CONSIDERABLY later, Robert Weston and Talu left the café together. They were laughing gaily, as people laugh who have the mixed excitement of too much wine and mutual attraction.

And standing there outside the café, looking for rickshaws, Weston, feeling courage from the warmth of what he drank, slipped his arm gently around Talu's slim waist.

She turned her face up toward his, then, no protest on her lips, a question in her eyes.

"Hong Kong at night is even more beautiful than I had ever imagined," Weston declared. His voice was husky, and he knew that the alcohol he'd consumed, though great enough, was not completely responsible for the quickened tempo of his pulse and the trembling of his knees.

"There is a place," Talu said softly, "in the hills, from which you can see the island spread beneath you like twinkling jewels of a necklace. You shall have to see Hong Kong from there some night."

Weston nodded. "I certainly shall. And would you be my guide?" He

looked down into her eyes and again felt the quickened, breathless hammering of his pulses.

Talu smiled softly. She nodded her golden head ever so slightly.

"If you would like me to," she promised.

Weston suddenly bent to kiss her red, moist, inviting lips. But before he was conscious of the gesture, she laughed coquettishly and brought her fan up to her face.

"You Americans are very impulsive," she murmured, her eyes smiling.

Weston blushed and felt suddenly like a schoolboy.

"I—I am sorry," he stammered. Quickly, he withdrew his arm from her slim waist.

Talu's eyes were still smiling. She lowered the fan slightly.

"And you are also very strange. You apologize for your wishes." Her hand found his, soft and fragile and cool in his big palm. She squeezed his hand ever so slightly.

"Now I am afraid you must take me home," she said.

Weston looked woebegone. "But the evening is young!" he protested. "This is my first night in Hong Kong—"

"But not your last," she cut in. Her voice was a promise.

"Then I may see you again?" he asked eagerly.

Talu nodded. "I see no harm."

"Tomorrow," Weston said swiftly. "Tomorrow for breakfast in the Hong Kong Hotel."

Talu laughed at him; laughter like tinkling bells. She shook her head.

"Not tomorrow morning" she said.

"Tomorrow afternoon?" Weston demanded.

Talu shook her head again. "I have an appointment," she declared.

"Then surely tomorrow evening for dinner," Weston pleaded. "We can

meet early and cross to Kowloon. We can dine at the Peninsula Hotel there."

TALU seemed to debate a moment.

Then her laughter tinkled again.

"Very well," she promised. "Perhaps there is something in the impulsive technique. Americans must believe in persistence."

Again Weston found himself fighting to resist the temptation of her lovely lips. The fan caught his eyes and suddenly he smiled.

"I never did hear the legend of your fan, Talu," he said. "Remember? You were going to tell me."

The girl seemed suddenly serious again.

"I had forgotten," she said somberly.

"It is a curious legend. This fan once belonged to a courtesan in the court of a great mandarin. She was a famous woman of her day—long, long ago, of course. Her name," the girl paused an instant, "her name was, strangely enough, the same as mine, Talu. I believe my mother named me after that original possessor of the fan."

"And this, this other Talu was beautiful?" Weston asked, looking gently at the girl beside him.

Talu nodded. "She was sung by the poets of the dynasty. Her beauty beggared the poor verses that were written about her. The mandarin was madly in love with her. But he was old, and evil, and she cared nothing for the jewels and attention he lavished on her."

Talu paused, looking up at Weston peculiarly. "Do you wish me to continue?"

Weston nodded eagerly. "Yes. Please do."

Talu seemed to reflect. Then she went on.

"The courtesan was in love with a young artist. Even in those days in China, artists were impoverished wan-

derers of no consequence in the political scheme of things. This Talu, however, cared nothing for the fact that her young artist was not measured in the worldly attainments of those about her. Secretly, she arranged to have her lover brought to the mandarin's court, and saw to it that he received subsidy from the dynasty." Talu paused.

"Please go on," Weston begged.

"For many moons," Talu continued, "the courtesan and her artist were able to live this way, having one another's love and companionship even in the shadow of the evil mandarin's throne. But the young man found this more and more to his dislike, and again and again tried to persuade this Talu to flee the court with him. He vowed that they could find peace and lasting happiness together far from the evil influence of the mandarin. But the girl was afraid. She knew that the wrath and vengeance of her evil sponsor would follow them no matter where they tried to flee. The young artist persisted in his pleas, however, and finally, against her better judgment, she agreed on a plan with him whereby they would escape together. The fan, this fan, was to serve as their means of signal when the hour for their scheme arrived."

Weston was puzzled. "The fan? How was it a signal?"

Talu smiled. "It was the custom of the court artists to paint the fans of the courtesans and great lords. They vied with each other, these court artists, to create the most beautiful symbols on the fans they painted. Talu's artist lover had painted most of her fans for her, and on each of them had depicted scenes known only to the two of them in their symbolism. On this fan it was agreed that the young artist would inscribe certain symbols and use prearranged colors if the time were ripe

for their escape. If not, he would indicate as much by the lack of the agreed colors and symbols on the fan."

"Very clever," Weston marveled.

TALU nodded. "Yes. It was extremely clever, except for one thing. The evil mandarin had learned of his courtesan's love for the young artist. He suspected that they would try to flee his court. And he had learned that they would communicate through means of this fan and its inscriptions."

"Ah, so it wasn't a happy ending?" Weston asked.

Talu shook her head, a sad little smile at the corners of her lovely mouth.

"No," she sighed. "It was not a happy ending. The mandarin arranged to intercept the fan. He read on it the symbols the young artist had inscribed, ordered the courtesan brought to him and demanded of her the truth."

"Did she admit to it?" Weston asked.

Talu shook her head. "No. She wanted only to save her lover's life. After showing her the fan, a masterpiece of art and color, tinted an exquisite gold, he tried to force her to admit her plan. She refused, hoping that the young artist would have time to flee the court alone and seek safety in the hills. She didn't know that the mandarin had already ordered her young lover seized and was holding him for execution at that moment. This Talu was tortured, but still would not admit to the identity of her lover. The mandarin kept her fan before her eyes, taunting her with it, until at last he wearied of his sadism and ordered the young artist slain."

Weston shuddered. "How horrible."

Talu nodded. "And the moment that the young artist died, the courtesan knew instantly of it. She knew from the fan itself."

"From the fan itself?" Weston frowned.

"It's gorgeous colorings and golden tint changed, miraculously, before the courtesan's eyes. The colorings faded to a dried brown, and the tint became a sheen of black—the color of death. The courtesan wanted life no longer, then, and died before she could be tortured any more."

Weston was silent for fully a minute. At last he said: "And this is the same fan?"

Talu extended the fan to him, nodding her head. "Yes. See the dried brown hues, and the sheen of black. It is the same fan."

Weston shook his head, rubbing his hand across his eyes. "A very tragic legend," he remarked.

"Many of the legends of China are tragic," Talu said.

Weston suddenly smiled. "But they are no more than legends," he declared.

Talu, too, smiled. "Yes. They are no more than legends. But I sometimes wonder about this fan and the original Talu. My mother would never tell me more."

"Perhaps," Weston said, "like all legends there was a happy ending to it in the hereafter."

"Perhaps," Talu said. Then she smiled at him. "But it is time that I am taken home."

"Of course," Weston said. "I don't mind taking you home now that I know there will be tomorrow."

Talu's almond eyes regarded him curiously. "In the East there is always tomorrow," she said. . . .

Talu had not lied to Robert Weston about her appointment the following afternoon. She quite definitely had one—with Mr. Shido. His quick tattoo knock sounded on her apartment door precisely at the minute on which he had said he would arrive.

HE STOOD there in the door, dressed in his precise, faultless whites, holding his panama hat in his small yellow hands. His gold teeth glittered in a grimace which he fondly believed to be a smile.

"*Eekonades cozeymahcak?*" Mr. Shido greeted her.

"Come in," Talu said a trifle distastefully. Mr. Shido's habit of foisting his native language on her was annoying. It implied a union which Talu resented.

"You have met the young American and arranged for future meetings?" Mr. Shido asked, taking a place on the divan and putting his hat carefully on a teakwood table beside it.

Talu lighted a cigarette, still standing, and nodded.

"Everything went off as scheduled," she said. "You really haven't any cause for worry. He's a lamb waiting for the shearing."

Mr. Shido regarded her humorlessly. "Worry is essential in a scheme as important as this. Never make the mistake of underestimating your quarry, Talu. The British and Americans at this moment make the mistake of underestimating my government."

Talu turned her back on him, paced to the end of the room, and wheeled to face him again.

"I am meeting him tonight," she said. "We are going across to the Kowloon side, to dine at the Peninsula Hotel."

"Excellent," said Mr. Shido, showing his pleasure by sucking his breath through his gold teeth.

"Have you anything else you want to tell me?" Talu asked.

Mr. Shido raised his eyebrows in surprise. "You are most abrupt," he said. "I sense something almost bordering on hostility in your attitude, Talu." He hissed in reverse and gave another one

of his imitations of a smile. "I had thought that we might talk a while."

"Our relationship goes only as far as matters such as that of the young American," Talu said tightly. "I spend my social hours as I wish."

"Talu!" Again there was that lifting of eyebrows and surprise. "I had heard that you were an excellent agent in matters such as this. That is why I engaged you. Please show no more impertinence. You would be wise not to draw my disapproval."

"I have worked with other agents of your country," Talu said angrily. "They showed none of the veering from duty which you seem to display. It would be best for you to confine your attention to this immediate problem on which your government has placed you."

Mr. Shido's golden smile vanished. His mouth went tight, and he rose stiffly, clutching at his panama hat with both hands.

"You are not being sensible," he declared. "If you were aware of my power, my importance in my government, perhaps you would be a little more amiable!"

Talu crushed out her cigarette, jamming it into a shell tray viciously with her jade holder.

"I have worked for many governments," she said in evenly controlled rage. "They mean nothing to me, any of them. The money they pay me is all that matters. In my work with their agents I have considered only one element—the job at hand. I hope that clears the situation for you, my friend Shido!"

Mr. Shido moved to the door. The expression on his mouth was again that imitation golden smile. But the smile never left his teeth. It stopped there. The expression in his slanted eyes was that of an angry brush snake.

"I will be back tomorrow, to check further on your progress, Talu," he declared. "You will please forget this unpleasant conversation. We will go on as if it had never occurred. Nothing must interfere to disrupt our plans. Nothing. *Sayroonerak.*"

AFTER Mr. Shido had gone Talu paced nervously, angrily back and forth across the room. She lighted several cigarettes in the course of the next twenty minutes, crushing them out, however, after a few short draughts.

At last she was able to regain control of herself, and then she smiled. She had been stupid to become so annoyed at the golden toothed little fool. She could have warded off his unwelcome ideas much more smoothly than she did. Such unpleasantness in her work had occurred before, and always her infinite experience had enabled her to sidestep such advances with nimble dexterity. She wondered what had made Shido's unspoken ideas so particularly annoying, and found herself puzzled for an answer.

"Perhaps it is because he is Japanese," she reasoned aloud. "They have become so increasingly smug, those yellow monkeys, these past few months. Their bluff and shouting has been beeded too seriously. It has gone to their heads. They grow arrogant, and much too bold."

And then, for no reason she could explain to herself, Talu thought of young Robert Weston. She remembered his hearty, honest laughter and scrubbed, friendly face.

"He is a child," she murmured, "and yet a man. Naïve—that is the word which best describes him."

She strode to the teakwood table and picked up her fan, flicking it open a moment to gaze at it.

"An oriental legend," she smiled. "I



really think the young fool believed my hastily improvised tale."

Closing the fan, Talu stood with it in her hands, looking almost absently at it. Her mind was still concerned with young Weston . . .

**I**N HIS hotel room late that afternoon, young Weston stood before a long mirror adjusting a black cummerbund around his waist. He was clad in fresh white drill and had already gone through this entire process of grooming at least four times. And as he went through the ritual again, Weston sang softly to himself the words of the ballad that had been running through his mind ever since his arrival in Hong Kong.

"Take me somewhere east of Suez—where the best is like the worst—est. Where there ain't no ten commandments and a man can raise a thirrrrr!"

And for the tenth time in an hour, Weston glanced quickly at his watch. He sighed. Not quite time. Talu would not be waiting for him for another fifteen minutes.

He concluded his grooming with a stately mock bow at his mirrored reflection. Then he went to his dresser where there was a tall, cool drink waiting half finished.

Weston found a chair, then, and with his drink in one hand expertly lighted a cigarette using only the other. He leaned back, savoring the smoke, the drink, and his thoughts. The latter were, of course, chiefly concerned with the glorious, glamorous Talu.

Again and again, Weston relived the moment of their meeting. And on each occasion he could again hear the sound of her soft, liquid voice, musically tinged with the faintest of strange accents.

He wondered, of course, who she

was, and what she was. He had dared not ask on taking her to her apartment the night before. But the very lack of knowledge concerning the beautiful Eurasian gave additionally glamorous mystery to her.

Talu—her name was exquisitely in keeping with her loveliness.

Weston smiled, lifting his glass and thinking of the week of adventure that lay ahead of him.

"Here's to the boys in the Hong Kong consular office!" he toasted. "May they be responsible for my meeting more and more creatures as lovely as Talu!"

**T**HE boys in the consular office, however, could scarcely have been expected to answer to young Weston's toast. They were far too frantically busy with other matters.

Martin Holliday, official of the staff who had been responsible for Weston's arrival, took time from his duties only to check on the fact that his observer, waiting in the lobby of the hotel where the young diplomacy cub was staying, reported the youth as returning from a tour of the island at approximately eleven thirty that previous evening. Young Weston had seemed acclimated and in good spirits, the observer went on to state.

"That's one less anxious day," Holliday commented to a trusted aide. "Now if the youngster can only go along with his sightseeing and keep out of trouble for another five days, we'll be all right."

"Wouldn't it be wise to make certain he stays out of trouble by having a man on his tail constantly?" the aide suggested.

Martin Holliday, nerves worn raw from his days and nights of tension and never ending work, snapped his answer irritably at his aide.

"I've explained that before! We don't dare put a man on Weston to follow him. All our men are known, possibly followed themselves by hostile agents. It would give Weston away immediately!"

The aide gave Holliday a grieved glance and left the office. Quite possibly he would have forgiven his superior's irritation had he realized—as no one did—that Jap bombs were scheduled to fall on Hong Kong within a week . . .

YOUNG Weston and Talu dined at the Peninsula Hotel in Kowloon, directly across from the island of Hong Kong proper. And after they had eaten there was champagne and dancing, moonlight such as only the East can furnish, all against the romantic background of tropically flowered gardens.

Later, they crossed Victoria Bay back to the island and drove to the peak of one of the smaller hills. There they sat silently, looking down at the glittering lights of the island beneath them. The first hilarity and gaiety of the evening had left, to be replaced by something akin to an unspoken communion of silence. This, at least, was what young Weston imagined it to be.

Talu, of course, was playing her hand with admirable finesse. She knew well that the young American could best be kept fascinated by constant and subtle variances of mood.

And still later, as he took Talu homeward, Weston asked the girl to tell the legend of the fan to him once more. In the darkness Talu smiled; but she managed to remember her fabrication of the previous evening. In the telling of the tale this time, however, she elaborated somewhat on the general line of the "legend," adding small new details which only seemed further to please the young American.

"But why are you so interested in the fan and its legend?" Talu asked Weston when they arrived at her door.

The young American's expression was serious, his answer what might have been expected of him.

"Why," he stammered, "if it hadn't been for your fan, Talu, we might never have met." He blushed then, and in confusion added: "It's always been an idea of mine that life is concocted of such little things. I—I mean, sometimes the most important events are caused by trifles."

Talu looked at his clean, honest eyes, and the smile on her lips trembled slightly. For an instant—and only that long—she wished that somehow their meeting had been truly caused by the fan, and that she were someone other than— But she drove this thought from her mind as swiftly as it had entered.

"Goodnight, my young American," she said. "It has been lovely." She turned to enter her apartment.

Weston was conscious only of his impulse. He didn't remember moving swiftly beside her, dropping his hand lightly on her arm so that she turned. He only knew that somehow he had found courage to sweep Talu into his arms, and that her lovely red lips were pressed against his own.

When he stepped back, releasing her, Weston was breathing heavily, and his senses reeled. The fragrance of jasmine from her golden hair was sheer intoxication.

And for once even Talu was surprised.

She touched her hand to her lips, her eyes wide, a curious expression in them.

"Impulsive young American," she whispered softly, "I—I am at a loss for something to say."

Weston swallowed, a dull flush coming to his scrubbed young cheeks. The

smile he ventured was uncertain, boyishly awkward.

"I will see you tomorrow?" he begged.

Talu nodded wordlessly. Then she turned away and was gone . . .

THEY lunched the following afternoon on the other side of the island, at the lavish Repulse Bay Hotel. Talu wore an afternoon dress of white chiffon, and Weston found himself marveling at the varied and infinite changes in the girl. The first night he'd met her she was the languorous, exotic siren of the east. The next meeting had made him feel as if she were the smart, sophisticated sort of young woman he'd squired so often in Manhattan. But this day found her displaying the ingenuous charm and fresh allure of a college girl.

"You laugh so much more today," Weston observed as they sipped martinis. "You seem gayer, happier—almost like a small girl at a circus."

Talu smiled at this.

"Perhaps laughter is an infectious thing. Perhaps youth is the same. Perhaps it is you who makes me feel as I do today," she said.

Weston shook his head. "Today I feel a hundred years older than you—and so much more wise. Really, Talu, I wish there were some foam candy to buy for you, and a ferris wheel to take you on." And then he laughed, coloring a little in embarrassment. "Although I must confess that for several glorious moments last night I felt as if you had taken me to the very peak of some glittering ferris wheel."

Talu's laughter tinkled again like tiny bells.

"You caught me totally by surprise," she said.

Weston smiled, but his eyes were suddenly serious. "And was it a ter-

ribly unwelcome surprise?" he asked.

"I am still trying to decide," Talu countered lightly.

"Perhaps the sample has evaporated by now," Weston said. "You might need another to refresh your memory and give you a better chance to make your decision."

Talu's lips were half parted in answer when her expression suddenly froze in something akin to sudden fright or annoyance. She seemed to be gazing intently past Weston's shoulder.

"What's wrong?" Weston demanded instantly. He half turned in his chair, trying to discover what had taken the girl's attention.

Talu put her hand swiftly on his.

"Nothing," she said rapidly. "Nothing at all. I thought for a moment that I'd seen a person I used to know. Someone I disliked intensely."

Weston was still turned slightly in his chair. There were only four or five other tables behind them in the section of the veranda where they were seated. But two of these tables were occupied. One by a party of middle-aged women, another by a solitary, dapper, white suited little Japanese.

None of the women was paying the slightest attention to them, and Weston had the impression somehow that the little Jap had been gazing intently at them and had just turned his eyes away as Weston had swiveled about to see what was up.

Weston turned back to Talu.

"Who was it that you thought you knew?" he demanded.

Talu shook her head. "She's gone, now. A woman. She passed up the walk behind those women at that table."

Weston smiled. "Evidently people whom you dislike, you dislike with utter thoroughness. You look positively pale, Talu."

Talu managed to smile.

"I don't think it was she—the woman I saw," she said. "But for a moment it gave me a terrible start. I—I'll tell you about her some time."

WESTON didn't press her further, and as their luncheon was served Talu seemed to regain most of her composure, though her laughter was less frequent and something in the mood they had reached seemed to have been destroyed. It was after their luncheon was over and they had ordered cocktails that the little Jap in the white suit and spotless panama passed their table and strolled leisurely into the hotel lobby. He didn't give them the briefest glance, but if the idea hadn't been so utterly idiotic, Weston would have sworn that Talu seemed to relax only after he was gone.

Talu's gaiety returned then, though Weston was far too intent in the loveliness of her beauty to notice that there was a sharp, almost forced, edge to it now. And when he at last returned her to her apartment he had no idea enroute of what was to occur as they parted.

A rickshaw waited in the street, and Weston stood holding both Talu's hands in his own.

"I don't believe I've ever had such an afternoon," Weston said. "We can't spoil it now by waiting until tomorrow for another meeting. What about dinner again tonight across Victoria Bay in the Peninsula Hotel?"

Talu's lovely mouth smiled, but there was something close to pain in her eyes.

She shook her head, the smile on her lips trembling ever so slightly.

"No, Robert," she said softly. "I have an engagement tonight. I am very sorry, of course. You must remember that all of this—our meeting

as we did—was most unexpected. I had had plans before that. I changed some of them; I could not change them all."

Weston's disappointment was but partly hidden behind his grin and light reply.

"That's right," he admitted. "Yet I feel as if I'm the only one who has a right to know you, to sit with you, to laugh with you. You will have to forgive that possessive streak. I'm afraid it's also very much American."

"I will forgive it, Robert," Talu said quietly, unsmiling.

"But there is tomorrow," Weston said. "I can have tomorrow to look forward to, can't I?"

Talu hesitated an instant. Her voice was almost muffled when at last she answered.

"I'm afraid I have another engagement for tomorrow, Robert."

"Not the entire day?" Weston protested.

Talu nodded slowly.

"But—" Weston began.

Talu touched his arm with her fingers. "Why don't you call me here at the apartment?" she asked.

Weston seemed uncomprehending. "Yes," he mumbled. "Yes, I certainly will call. But I thought that—"

Again Talu cut him off. "I must hurry, Robert. This has been a day I shall long remember. Do you wish to, to refresh the sample—as you called it—from last night?"

Weston grinned suddenly.

"The conversation strikes a happy note," he said lightly. "Yes. I would most certainly like to refresh that sample of last night. For myself, as well as for you."

But his hands, as he put them on the girl's slim shoulders, were unsteady, and no amount of effort at casual levity could stem the sudden wave of weak

excitement that flooded his veins.

Weston was looking down into Talu's upturned lovely face one moment, his hands lightly on her shoulders. And in the next, his arms were tightly around the girl and his lips were hard against the ripe softness of her mouth as her body unresistingly drew close to his.

THEN they had both stepped back, and Talu was looking up at him.

"Call me, Robert," she said faintly. "Goodbye, and thanks for—for everything."

She turned away, and Weston watched her leave. It wasn't until minutes had passed that he realized the rickshaw still waited in the street behind him.

He turned quickly, then, almost stepping on the small fan that lay at his feet. He stepped back, bent, and picked it up. It was Talu's fan, undoubtedly. In her haste in leaving she had dropped it.

Weston held it in his hand, staring at it. For a moment he thought of following her, returning it to her at once. He flicked it half open, gazing at the faded brown hues of the characters beneath the black sheen that covered it.

Then, as if on sudden resolve, he snapped it shut and put it in his pocket. He would return it to her the following day, he decided. It provided a perfect excuse for seeing her again tomorrow . . .

When Talu let herself into her apartment, she was still unconscious of the fact that she no longer carried her fan. And the discovery of its loss was forestalled for the moment due to the shock she received on seeing the slant-eyed Mr. Shido sitting there waiting for her.

She had just closed the door behind

her and was removing her hat when she saw him. He hadn't spoken, and even now was staring wordlessly at her.

Talu's hand went to her mouth to stifle her involuntary cry of alarm. And then her momentary fright vanished to give way to anger.

"How did you get in here?" she snapped. "What do you want?"

Mr. Shido smiled his golden smile.

"I took the liberty of using a key which works most admirably on the sort of lock you have on your door. I expected you would return here before rejoining the young American fool for the evening."

"You take numerous liberties," Talu said angrily. "I like none of them. Please state your business and get out."

Mr. Shido's golden smile remained mechanically fixed. In his slant eyes there was anger.

"You are forgetting yourself, Talu," he declared. "And I have reason to believe that you might almost be guilty of forgetting your task with that young American ass."

"What do you mean by that?" Talu demanded.

"When I lunched at the Repulse Bay Hotel this afternoon it was not by chance. I went there when I learned that was where you and our young fool would be."

"Then you were spying on me!" Talu said, white with anger.

Mr. Shido nodded.

"You might call it that," he said. "However, I found it extremely interesting, and somewhat worrying. Your enthusiasm for the young American seemed completely genuine. I suspected you had to do little acting to appear so completely enthralled by his presence."

TALU'S anger changed to an emotion akin to sudden fear. She tried

to hide this from his eyes, striding swiftly to a table where she took a cigarette and holder from a box.

"That is ridiculous!" she snapped.

Mr. Shido raised his eyebrows. "Is it?" he inquired.

"Of course," Talu said. She lighted her cigarette with fingers that trembled ever so slightly.

"You are seeing him again tonight?"

Mr. Shido asked casually.

Talu took a deep draught from her cigarette. She turned to face Mr. Shido.

"No," she said. "I am not seeing him tonight."

Mr. Shido did not seem surprised.

"And why not?" he asked.

"I have something else to do," Talu said quickly.

"What?" Mr. Shido's question snapped like a whip, and the golden smile left his face.

"Something that is of no concern of yours," Talu said.

"And you are going to let the young American fool wander loose from your influence?" the Jap demanded.

Talu shook her head. "I thought it wise that I let him pine tonight. He is to call tomorrow. I can handle these things very capably without interference."

"There has been a necessity to alter plans somewhat," Mr. Shido said. "I came here to tell you that. We will have to work more quickly than I first imagined. Through a leak in their diplomatic office, I learned that the Americans have decided to use young Weston sooner than they intended. Tomorrow night the stupid young American will be given certain papers to take to a British official on the outskirts of Kowloon. They contain information as to plans for evacuation of the more important officials in Hong Kong, should such action become neces-

sary. We will get those papers from young Weston—through you."

"Evacuation?" Talu was unable to keep the startled surprise from her voice.

Mr. Shido smiled. "Certain measures will be taken soon by my government which might make evacuation of all whites from Asia extremely necessary."

Talu stared at the little Mr. Shido as if he had gone suddenly insane.

"I see you are surprised," Mr. Shido said. His golden smile widened. "Many others will be surprised, also."

"But the Japs don't intend—" Talu began.

Mr. Shido broke in. "Japan is becoming increasingly irritated by the stupidity of American and British attitudes toward her. Unless many drastic reversals in their policies are made, or agreed upon, within the next several days, she will show her claws to those white-faced devils."

TALU seemed suddenly relieved.

Mr. Shido was but repeating the time-worn Nipponese bluff and boast. His talk was nothing more than talk. Actually, Talu felt sure again, the Japs would not dare to show their hand. But what of this talk about evacuation plans?

"Are you certain of what young Weston will be carrying?" Talu demanded.

Mr. Shido looked all-knowing. "I see that you cannot appreciate the present terror of the Americans and British. You cannot comprehend that they would think in terms of evacuation. They are even trying to conceal their close collaboration with one another here in Hong Kong. Hence the secrecy with which young Weston's task has been cloaked."

"And is it tomorrow night when

young Weston will be given the papers?" Talu demanded.

MR. SHIDO nodded. "Precisely. The seventh day of December,\* one night from tonight." His additional elaboration was obviously meant for sarcastic emphasis, for he added: "Just to make certain you do not slip up on your part in our plan."

Talu crushed out her cigarette. "I see. When he calls tomorrow I shall arrange to have him here tomorrow evening."

"You will arrange to have him spend the better part of the entire day with you, Talu," Shido corrected. "We must not risk his discharging his mission sometime during the day—even though it is now planned for the evening."

Talu nodded. "Very well, then."

Mr. Shido rose. "Please do not let any feeling for the stupid youth betray your mission at the last minute. It would be decidedly unwise for you to do so. Then both of you would die."

"Both of us?" Talu's shock was too strong to conceal. "You mean that you plan to kill this boy?"

Mr. Shido smiled. "Naturally," he said. "We must complete our task thoroughly. You have led others to their deaths; surely you have no qualms about this youth."

"But—but is it necessary?" Talu asked whitely. "Merely to get his papers?"

"I have planned it as necessary," Mr. Shido declared. "He might be stupid enough to resist. It is better to kill him before he suspects anything. It will, ah, facilitate matters greatly."

Mr. Shido moved to the door, displaying his golden smile again.

"I shall warn you again to comply with every detail as I have arranged it. Do not get any ideas at this late hour. You would regret it." Then he was gone. . . .

WHEN Weston returned to his hotel he found the envelope lying casually on his dresser. It was addressed to him, and when he opened it puzzledly, he found it contained a single sheet of white paper on which was typewritten a curious message.

"Man from consular office will meet you tomorrow in your room. He will give you portfolio and instructions as to where to deliver it. He will be there promptly at six p. m. Destroy this message.

Holliday."

Weston reread the message several times, frowning. Then he crumpled it lengthwise, carried it over to a wastebasket and touched a match to it. He held it as it burned, dropping it in the basket only after the part on which the message had been written was destroyed.

As he prepared to change for dinner he wondered at great length as to what the message meant. Holliday hadn't wanted him to report at the consular offices until a week had passed. And now this message.

Weston realized that the instructions to destroy the note were, in times and under situations such as this, standardly routine. He was not, therefore, disturbed by that part of it. But as to the papers that would be given him, and the delivery that would be necessary, Weston was distinctly bewildered. What could it be about? Weston couldn't bring himself to believe that the mission which was being assigned to him was one of any

\* 7th of December, in Hong Kong, due to international date line, is equivalent to 6th of December in U. S. A.—Ed.

great importance. He knew that he was too inexperienced, too untried, as yet, to be of any value on important matters.

Perhaps this, then, was just a baptism. Sort of—and he grinned ruefully at the thought—breaking him into his work as an unofficial messenger boy. Weston shrugged and gave it up. It was only too easy to turn his thoughts back to Talu, for he was still in the throes of bitter disappointment over not being able to see her this evening.

"Of course she'd have other things to do besides spend all her waking hours in my company," Weston admitted to himself. "I could have expected this. But—" and he frowned, recalling Talu's inflections, expressions, as they had parted. It began to be clear to him that she had seemed somewhat different, almost troubled, in their parting.

"Why dammit!" Weston exploded, shocked at the thought. "She acted quite as if she never expected to see me again!"

Instinctively, Weston started for the telephone. Then he stopped, taking his hand back from the instrument. No. He was acting ridiculous. She had said to call her tomorrow. And if she hadn't expected to see him or hear from him again she wouldn't have told him that.

But Weston was unable to put the matter completely from his mind. And its weight settled over him like a heavy shroud. He felt suddenly blue, very lonesome, and inexplicably uneasy.

"Tonight," Weston promised himself, "I shall find a bar and get stinking drunk." He sighed and ran a hand through his hair.

"Talu, Talu," he muttered, "I'm afraid you have me quite on the ropes, my girl."

Weston lifted the telephone from the cradle and called for a drink . . .

On the morning of the following day young Weston woke with a shattering headache and innumerable regrets. He could recall fuzzily a drinking bout that began in a waterfront saloon with several sailors from British merchant ships. He remembered the exhilaration of the first drinks, the singing and the shouting, and several hilarious passages from one bar to another via rickshaw. His memory of returning to the hotel was almost completely a blot.

And then he remembered that he was to call Talu.

WESTON rose from his bed and made his way unsteadily to the shower. He stood for perhaps ten minutes under a steaming spray, feeling some of the life returning to his numbed body from the hot spray along the nerves of his neck and shoulders. Then he turned the shower on cold and suffered for five minutes under a frigid, stinging lash. When he emerged from the shower toweling himself briskly, he felt considerably better.

He was able to call Talu, then.

The operator had at last been forced to remind him that there was no answer, and that if he would ring off they would try the number for him again after a little while.

Glumly, Weston put the telephone back and went about dressing.

The clock on the dresser told him it was a little after ten, and he found himself wondering where the girl could be at this hour of the morning. She had told him to call, and this seemed to be a reasonable hour at which to expect a call from him—so where was she?

When Weston had dressed, impatiently he tried again to call her. There was still no answer, and again the operator promised to try the number a



little later.

Weston had his breakfast sent up to his room, deciding that Talu might possibly try to call him, should she be out somewhere. He didn't want to run the risk of missing her, should she do so.

But Weston received no incoming calls.

It was after eleven when he finally crushed out his fourth after-breakfast cigarette and walked to the telephone again. But as before, he was still unable to reach Talu.

Cursing, Weston slipped into his coat and started toward the door. It was then that Talu's fan, lying atop the dresser where he had left it the night before, caught his eye.

He turned back to get it, deciding to take it with him, and was suddenly aware of the incredible transformation in its coloring.

For a moment, as Weston stared at it, he felt certain that it was some other fan, that it couldn't possibly be the same that Talu had dropped.

But the characters, the size and shape of it, everything save the coloring, seemed identical to Talu's fan. And the tinting, instead of being the dried brown, black sheened color that it had been, was now an incredibly gorgeous combination of rose, saffron, and rich amber—all sheened by a glossy covering tint of beautiful gold!

Weston stood there, turning the fan in his hands, jaws agape, too stunned by this incredible transformation to fully comprehend it.

"Good God," he muttered hoarsely. "Good God—this is impossible!"

It occurred to Weston then that this might well be a curio he picked up during his drunken spree the evening before. Perhaps he had stumbled into some small shop, attracted by this fan's similarity to the one Talu owned.

Swiftly, Weston began a search for another fan. Five minutes passed and he had rummaged through all his possessions. He hadn't found another one.

Weston knew he hadn't taken Talu's fan with him when he'd left the hotel the night before. So it should still be here in his room. And there was no fan but this gorgeously colored, golden tinted masterpiece.

That left him with but one conclusion. This was the same fan that Talu had had. There could be no other. His first supposition, impossible as it was, was nonetheless correct. Talu's fan had changed, had come alive with color!

AND then Weston recalled the legend of the fan, the strange little tale Talu had told him of its history.

"I'm out of my mind," he muttered. "It's too fantastically impossible. It's just a silly ancient legend."

Weston tried hard to convince himself of this. He tried hard and kept his mind as far afield from the actuality of the transformation as he could.

"It couldn't be," he told himself again and again. "It just couldn't be possible."

Nevertheless, he had the fan in his pocket when he left his room. And in his heart there was a tingling excitement, a sensation of incredibly thrilling unreality. He felt as if something alive had taken possession of that fan. And his impatience to reach Talu was now a frantic urgency. He determined to go directly to her apartment. To wait there until she came back to it. He left a message at the hotel desk that he would call in regularly and to hold any communications for him. . . .

Weston had never imagined, of course, that Talu was actually in her apartment all the time that he'd been trying to reach her. It could never

have occurred to him that she'd been listening to the incessant ringing of her telephone with iron-willed determination not to answer it.

For Talu was quite certain that young Weston was the one who was so urgently trying to reach her. And she was equally certain that she had seen him for the last time. Sickly certain, perhaps, for Talu was now too well aware that she loved Robert Weston.

She expected, too, as she paced tensely back and forth smoking innumerable cigarettes, that Weston would come directly here to her apartment after his efforts to reach her by telephone had failed.

"But I cannot see him," she told herself again and again. "I dare not, even though I know what that will mean."

Tonight was the night. The night Mr. Shido had planned the death of young Weston and the theft of the papers he carried with him. And if Weston came here to her apartment after receiving those papers, he would be sauntering straight into the arms of eternity.

Talu was afraid, horribly, terribly afraid. Not for herself so much as for Weston. Weston, the clean, scrubbed, honest-eyed young American. Weston, the athletic, eager, naive child who had been such easy prey for the long practiced lures of Talu.

It was not enough that she evade Weston, Talu knew. It was not enough that she failed to see him, failed to arrange a meeting. For Shido would, in a very short while, be aware of her double-dealing. And Mr. Shido, under such circumstances, would be capable of anything.

It was Shido's coming that Talu dreaded.

Through the slatted blinds of her windows, Talu could watch the street. She saw Weston when he first arrived.

And she waited through the endless ringing of her apartment bell until at last he left. Hours passed, and Weston returned again and again to try unsuccessfully for admission. It was shortly after five thirty, when Weston left for the tenth time, that Mr. Shido entered the apartment noiselessly.

TALU hadn't even seen the little Jap coming up the street. And she whirled from the window, gasping her terror, as he entered her apartment.

Mr. Shido wasn't smiling now. His slant eyes were fired with venomous hate.

"Talu!" he spat the word.

Talu didn't try to answer. She stared in fascination at him; the rabbit hypnotized by the snake. Fear almost suffocated her, her lovely breasts rose and fell swiftly in her fight for breath.

Mr. Shido held an automatic pistol in his hand. It was pointed at Talu.

"You have reacted as I was afraid you would, Talu," Shido said. "You will pay for it. Young Weston will be given the papers at six. I have learned that. You will call his hotel, leaving a message that he come here to your apartment at six-thirty. He will have the papers with him, since he is to deliver them at seven o'clock. They dare not tell the young fool the urgency of his mission for fear he might make a misstep under the strain. He will think nothing of delaying the delivery of his portfolio. Perhaps, by keeping him away today you have increased his urgency to see you and played into my hands."

"I will not call him," Talu said.

Mr. Shido nodded. "You are right. I shall call and leave the message for him. I would not think to trust you to do so."

Talu stared hypnotized at the gun. Mr. Shido read her thoughts.

"Do not be foolish," he advised her. "Your death at this moment would not complicate my plans at all. If you wish to live a little longer, please sit down there—," he waved the gun toward the divan, "and we will wait the coming of young Weston. In the meantime," Shido stepped to the telephone, "I shall call his hotel and leave, ah, your message for him."

Weakly, Talu slumped to the divan. She still stared in horrified fascination at Shido as he began the call. . . .

YOUNG Weston arrived at his hotel scarcely five minutes before six. And he had hardly removed his coat, once in his room, when a knock sounded on his door.

The man who stood there when he opened it was Chinese, dressed in quite occidental tweeds. He was small, middle-aged, and unsmiling. He carried a portfolio with him.

"I am from Holliday," he said softly, entering.

Weston stared at him guiltily, realizing that he had almost completely forgotten his assignment.

"Please sit down," Weston said hastily.

The Chinese shook his head. "I have no time," he apologized, handing the portfolio to Weston. "These contain the papers you are to deliver to British officials on the outskirts of Kowloon. The specific instructions are inside this envelope." He pulled forth a manila envelope from his pocket, handing it to Weston with the portfolio.

"It is urgent?" Weston asked. He suddenly felt foolish for his question, but before a flush of embarrassment came to his cheeks, the little Chinese had shrugged.

"They must be delivered within hour or two," he said. "No time for Holliday to get another to carry them."

The little Chinese spoke with almost casual indifference, and Weston found himself feeling pleased over how closely he had called this assignment when he first learned of it. Nothing more or less than a glorified messenger task.

He took the portfolio and the envelope. The Chinese turned toward the door.

"Tell Holliday that I'll be in at the office the day after tomorrow," Weston said. "As he instructed," he added.

The Chinese nodded and left. Weston closed the door, and a moment later his telephone rang. He picked up the instrument from its cradle.

"This is the desk, Mr. Weston," a voice said. "Message left for you while you were out."

Weston's heart suddenly started to pound.

"Read it, please," he asked.

"Unable to see you today. Sorry. See me at my apartment at six-thirty tonight. I will explain. Talu."

"Is that all?" Weston demanded.

"That is all."

Weston hung up. He glanced at the clock on his dresser. A few minutes after six. He'd have time to make it. He could take the papers—he paused to tear open the manila envelope and scan his instructions briefly—to the Kowloon outskirts after seeing Talu. Perhaps she could come with him, and when he was done with his message-carrying they might dine at the Peninsula Hotel.

Weston shrugged into his coat, stuffing the envelope into his inside pocket and shoving the portfolio under his arm. For an instant his hand touched his pocket, and he felt the fan lying there. He brought it forth briefly to marvel again at the incredible color transformation. His eagerness to show the fan to Talu, to learn if she would have any explanation for its astonishing

change, was even greater now. Weston forced himself to tear his eyes from the fan and placed it again in his pocket. Then he left the room . . .

TALU sat white faced, rigid in fear on the divan in her apartment. Her eyes were fixed alternately on the small clock atop the teakwood table to her left and the motionless Mr. Shido, who sat stiffly in a chair by the door, automatic resting on the white crease of his trousers at his knee.

It was almost six-thirty.

Mr. Shido hadn't spoken in over fifteen minutes. For perhaps five minutes after he had called Weston's hotel to leave the message, Talu had sobbed sickly, uncontrollably, in terror.

But her tears were over now; her eyes were dry. There was no emotion left in her but the terrible tension that came with waiting.

Twice it had seemed that Weston was outside. Talu had been certain that she recognized his step. But the sounds had moved on past the apartment.

Talu was realist enough to know that her despairing hope that Weston might be somehow prevented from arriving at the apartment was an impossible one. He would come. Nothing would prevent it. He would arrive within the next few minutes.

Footsteps sounded in the street once more. Talu's eyes widened. Her swift glance at the clock showed that it was precisely six-thirty.

Shido had seen her sudden reaction to the steps, her glance at the clock. Now he rose from his chair.

"It is Weston?" he demanded. "You know his walk?"

The steps had paused, apparently before the apartment.

Talu rose from the divan. Shido whipped up the automatic and trained

it on her instantly.

"It is Weston!" Shido hissed in satisfaction.

Talu stood beside the teakwood table. A small, soapstone cigarette box was within reach of her hand. Talu took a deep breath. The footsteps outside sounded nothing like Weston's. But she said:

"Yes. It is Weston."

That split second, in which Shido turned involuntarily toward the door, was all that Talu needed. With lightning swiftness, she swept up the soapstone box and in the same gesture hurled it straight at the side of Shido's skull.

The Jap had time only to turn half-way back toward her. The box crashed into the side of his skull a fraction of a second before his finger triggered the automatic twice.

The noise of the gun blasted deafeningly through the small room, the sound of the shots so close together as to be one.

And then Shido was sinking to the floor, dazed, semi-conscious, the gun slipping from his fingers as an ugly splotch of blood oozed darkly from the side of his crushed skull.

But Talu, too, was sinking slowly to the floor, a crimson blotch inking the white tunic of her blouse. Both of Shido's shots were buried in her breast.

Shido was struggling, clawing at the rug with talon-like fingers in an effort to retrieve his gun. It was Talu who reached the gun first, dragging herself across the floor with the last of her ebbing strength. Her hand closed around the weapon and she managed to bring it up long enough to spend the remainder of its bullets into what was left of Mr. Shido's skull . . .

YOUNG Weston arrived at the apartment some ten minutes later.

Of course he was unable to gain admittance. There was no one alive to let him in. For some fifteen minutes he rang futilely. And then, bewildered and bitterly despairing, he left to carry out his "messenger duty" at the outskirts of Kowloon.

Weston had no way of ever knowing what became of Talu. For the Jap bombers struck at Hong Kong in all their treacherous fury the following day. The day, incidentally, on which they duplicated that cowardly attack over Pearl Harbor.

The apartment in which the bodies of Talu and Shido lay was decimated along with other civilian dwellings, and though Weston saw the tangled debris he dared hope that somehow Talu was with the refugees who had escaped on

the first day of the attack.

Weston was able to escape before the insular metropolis fell to the hordes from Nippon. Managed, incidentally, because his own "messenger duty" was successfully carried out.

It is ironic that Weston still swears he shall find Talu again when this great horror has ended. And it is doubly ironic that he still carries her fan, and is utterly bewildered by the fact that the gorgeous colorings it assumed are no longer in evidence. The colors of love and youth and beauty, rose and saffron, tinted golden, are gone. The fan is once again a dried brown hue. And the black lacquered sheen covers the faded characters. Black—the color of death . . .

The End



## PROVES MAN IS GOD

A strange method of mind and body control, that leads to immense powers never before experienced, is announced by Edwin J. Dingle, F.R.G.S., well-known explorer and geographer. It is said to bring about almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind. Many report improvement in health. Others acquire superb bodily strength, secure better positions, turn failure into success. Often, with surprising speed, talents, ability and a more magnetic personality are developed.

This startling method was found in remote and mysterious Tibet, formerly a forbidden country, rarely visited by outsiders, and often called the land of miracles in the astounding books written about it. Here, behind the highest mountains in the world, Mr. Dingle learned the extraordinary system he is now disclosing to the Western world.

He maintains that all of us are giants in strength and mind-power, capable of surprising feats, from the delay of old age to the prolonging of youth, and the achievement of dazzling business and professional success. From childhood, however, we are hypnotized by a false idea of what we really are.

Most of us know that God is everywhere, but never realize that God cannot be everywhere without being also in us. And if He is in us, then all His wisdom, all His power — unlimited knowledge and infinite power — is likewise in us. If God is everywhere, then there is nothing but God, and we also are that — a completely successful human life being the expression of God in man. The Holy Spirit of the Bible is an actual living force in man, and through it we too can do "greater things than these." The method found by Mr. Dingle in Tibet is said to be remarkably instrumental in freeing our minds of the hypnotizing ideas which blind us to the vast power of this living force within us.

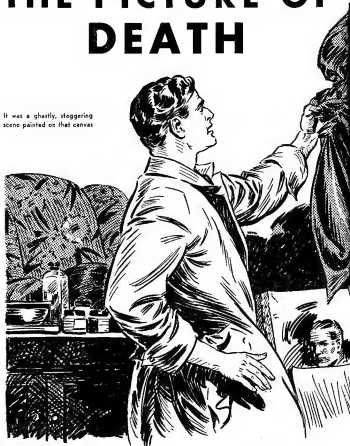


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# THE PICTURE OF DEATH

It was a ghastly, staggering scene painted on that canvas



**This hulking, brutish man was a marvelous subject for a painting—until the character turned out to be too close to actual truth!**



by WILLIAM P. Mc GIVERN

WHEN I walked into Harry Saunders' office on the tenth floor of *Republic Magazines'* new building, he looked up from his desk and nodded pleasantly.

"Sit down," he said, waving me to a chair beside his desk. "Smoke?"

I sat down, accepted the cigarette and lit it carefully. From Saunders' manner I began to hope he might have good news.

"Well, what's the verdict?" I asked, trying to make the question as casual as possible. I'm afraid I didn't quite succeed in that attempt. It isn't easy to act unconcerned when your week's meals and lodgings depend on an art director's decision.

Saunders didn't answer immediately. He leaned back in his chair and took a great deal of time in lighting his cigarette. I knew he was stalling. He

was a nice guy and he didn't like to say no soap. But he finally got around to it.

He looked at me with troubled eyes. "I'd like to buy your illustrations," he said, "but there's an element of reality lacking. Your backgrounds are okay, your composition is nice, but your male characters just don't have the brutality and toughness they should."

I smiled bitterly and shrugged my shoulders.

"If I haven't got it, I haven't got it," I said. "I've been in the 'art' business for a dozen years, but I'm learning that 'art' hasn't got anything to do with making a living with magazine illustrations. Thanks, Harry, you've done the best anyone could for a misguided mural painter."

I crushed out the cigarette and stood up, but Harry said, "Wait a minute." He stood up and stepped around his desk.

"Don't let a few rejections lick you," he said. "At least, try once more. Do a villain for me, a rough, tough, nasty gent that I can really be scared of. Forget the background and incidental characters."

"Okay," I said, and moved to the door. "I'll do it tonight and bring it in first thing in the morning."

"Oh, by the way," Harry said. He coughed and looked away in embarrassment. "If you could use a few bucks for a while—"

"Thanks," I said. "I'll be okay, Harry."

I opened the door and walked down the corridor to the elevators. Outside the building it was rapidly getting dark, and a soft snow was falling on the hurrying pedestrians.

I turned my collar up and started walking. An hour later I let myself into my bleak, cold, cramped attic-studio. I turned on the light over my

drawing board and then turned up the gas under the coffee pot.

I had never been a fast craftsman and I knew that the job of drawing one character would take most of the night. I didn't particularly look forward to the hours that stretched ahead of me. Drawing is hard work for me. Work that I love, but, nevertheless, work.

While the coffee was heating, I blocked in a frame for my main figure. I hadn't the faintest idea of what my character would be. Not having the money to afford models, I was forced to use my imagination in creating illustrations.

AS I sat before the board, toying with ideas, I happened to glance out the window and see, across the narrow court, the figure of a man outlined against a window.

He had his back to the window, but as I watched, he turned and I had a full view of his features. They were brutal and coarse, and in his small, deep-sunk eyes there was something unimaginably evil. From his shoulders and arms I could see that he was powerfully built, probably of enormous strength. His hair was coarse and black.

The light in his room shone full on his face, and I was able to analyze each feature and line carefully.

Automatically I picked up my drawing pencil. I was hardly conscious of what I was doing, so absorbed was I in the man across the court. Something in the bestial brutality of his features fired my imagination, inflamed my senses and set my heart pounding.

My pencil flashed across the drawing paper with swift, sure strokes. I had never drawn with such ease and effect in my entire career. It was as if some psychic influence was at work, driving me on, ordering my thoughts and di-



recting my hand.

I was afraid, terribly afraid, that the man would turn away from the light before I completed the sketch.

I worked furiously, studying my subject with white-hot concentration, and feverishly transmitting the almost sadistic brutality of his features to the drawing paper.

At last the thing was done. And at that same second the man across the court turned away from his window, and the light in his room disappeared.

I felt enormously lucky and strangely exhilarated.

I studied the drawing carefully. It was simply done, yet there was an undeniable impact in its effect. I *had* caught the essence of chilling evil that, to my eyes at least, was stamped unmistakably on the face of the man across the court.

I felt like celebrating. Here, the job I had been dreading as an all-night session was completed in ten minutes. But most gratifying was the realization that I had done a coldly realistic piece of work. The illustration was good, I knew. Something of myself, and something from my subject had merged together to create this drawing.

With a rare feeling of jubilation I went to the closet and took down one of my cherished possessions, a full pint of good whiskey. I had been saving it until I had something to celebrate, and this seemed the proper occasion.

I had three drinks in a row, silently toasting myself each time. I am not accustomed to liquor, and when I finally lay down on my cot, my head was spinning very pleasantly.

WHEN I awoke it was morning.

A faint early light was creeping in through the window, and I had a bad headache. I still had my clothes on.

I stood up and pressed my hands to

my temples. Gradually the memory of the previous evening returned. I didn't feel so bad then. At least I had a good piece of work to show Saunders.

I washed, changed my shirt and, feeling almost normal again, I drew back the shades and let the North light pour into the room. I was anxious to inspect the drawing in the sometimes damning light of day.

I swung the drawing board around, and let the clear morning light splash over the illustration I'd done of the man across the court.

The sight that met my eyes caused me to gasp in astonished horror.

The illustration was completely changed!

The figure of the man was bent in a crouch, and his lips were flattened against his teeth in demoniacal leer. In his hooked, talon-like hands was an axe, smeared and bloody.

And, most horrible of all, between his spread feet was the form of a young girl, her head hacked almost completely from her shoulders.

I sat down, my knees suddenly weak. The horrible force of the gruesome drawing was physically staggering.

The illustration was a masterpiece of macabre horror.

But who had done it? The central figure was mine, but had someone visited my room in the dead of night to add the gruesome details of the murder?

I stared at the illustration for many long minutes. There was something plucking at my subconscious, some psychic half-memory of this scene, as if possibly I had dreamed or imagined it years ago.

I shook my head irritably at this thought. I was indulging in a form of self-hypnosis, trying to convince myself of something or other.

There was a rational explanation to

this phenomenon, I told myself firmly. The style of the art was mine throughout the picture. I recognized that instantly. Therefore I had drawn in the figure of the murdered girl, changed my central character into a bestial maniacal killer, dramatized the illustration into a blood-chilling picture.

That much was obvious. But how had I done all this? And why did I have no recollection of it?

There was only one answer to both those questions. I must have changed the illustration during my drink-befogged sleep. That was the only logical solution. Possibly the unaccustomed stimulus of the alcohol had provided the subconscious impetus to return to the drawing board and re-design the illustration.

Possibly . . .

I removed the illustration from the drawing board and rolled it up tightly.

There was no sense worrying about the thing. It was done; that was that. This realistic view comforted me more than my attempts at rationalization. I left my studio with the illustration under my arm and walked uptown to the *Republic Magazines'* building.

WHEN I spread the illustration on Harry Saunders' desk, a half hour later, his eyes brightened with interest and he stood up excitedly.

"Now you've got it," he said, slapping me on the shoulder. "This picture has got some guts to it. It's realistic and convincing."

He stared a long moment at the illustration.

"Did you get the idea for this scene from the morning newspaper?" he asked abruptly.

"No," I said, surprised. "I got it from—"

My voice and thoughts trailed away. Where *had* I got the idea?

"What do you mean?" I demanded. "I haven't seen the morning papers yet. Was there some sort of murder last night?"

Saunders shuddered slightly.

"A very unpretty one, if we may judge from the harrowing details of our melodramatic reporters. Young girl, axe killer, lonely wharf. Maniac probably."

For some reason, my thoughts were spinning crazily.

"I didn't know a thing about it," I said harshly.

"Okay, okay," Saunders grinned. "It doesn't make any difference one way or the other. I don't care whether you get your ideas from the daily papers or the telephone book. The important thing now is that I want more work from you. This illustration has got what it takes. Now get back to your studio and turn out as many you can just like it. And stick to this main figure of the villain. You've got something there. He looks bad enough to be real."

"All right," I said.

"I'll have a check for you tomorrow on this job," Saunders said. "As long as you can keep up this kind of work, you're all set."

"All right," I said. "I'll be in tomorrow."

I left his office and my feelings were difficult to analyze. I should have been riotously happy at having finally made the grade with *Republic Magazines*, but for some reason my happiness was tempered with another emotion I could not define.

On the street I bought a paper and carefully read the story of the murder Saunders mentioned. This action was in itself unexplainable. Normally such things do not interest me, but now I read the story avidly.

The girl's body was awaiting iden-

tification; the axe killer was still at large. Police were of the opinion that it was the work of a maniac. That was the substance of the story.

I frowned and walked on. When I reached my studio it was about noon. I had a little something to eat, then I sat down at my drawing board.

The strong North light was streaming over my shoulder and every condition was favorable to work, but for some reason I couldn't recapture the feeling and mood that I had experienced the previous day.

I tried a dozen times to draw from memory the man I'd seen across the court, but it was worse than futile. Each succeeding attempt became less and less what I wanted, until I finally tore the sheet from the board, and with an exclamation of disgust, hurled it to the floor.

THE afternoon passed and darkness fell swiftly. I turned on the light over my easel and made another desperate attempt to get to work. While I was seated there, concentrating on the scene in my mind, the light across the court flicked on, and I saw my subject again, silhouetted against the illumination in his room.

He was pacing up and down the floor with slow measured strides. The court that separated our windows was only a dozen feet wide, and I could see details in the room very clearly.

I could see his huge hands clasped behind his back and I could see the black scowl on his face with almost frightening distinctness.

Even more than the first time, I was impressed with the malignant evil that seemed to emanate from the man's broad brutal face and close-set, blazing eyes.

Again, without conscious volition on my part, I reached for my drawing

pencil and began to sketch feverishly. There seemed to be some psychic connection between this ugly brute across the court, and my own mind. When I studied him for a while something seemed to take possession of me, driving me to work, to create scenes which had before been foreign to my imagination.

I was drawing a background now, hastily sketching in a vacant lot, complete with shrubbery, refuse pile and an abandoned incinerator. In the distance were small bungalows with lights burning in the front room. It was night. The moon was shadowed by a passing cloud, and there was an oppressive, eerie stillness over the entire scene.

I began to draw a character. It was the man across the court. Without glancing from my drawing board I blocked in a figure with heavy massive shoulders, swinging arms with curved fingers, slightly bent knees, crouching along the shrubbery that flanked the lonely path leading through the vacant lot to the bungalow. The face was twisted and inhuman, one half in shadow, the other caught in the glare of a street light. One blazing eye, one distended nostril and half of the thick, slaverling lips were visible, a horrible, incomplete picture of a creature from the bowels of hell.

I finished the figure rapidly. Every stroke was sure and definite, there was no hesitation, no erasure, nothing but swift sure delineation.

When I finished the picture I was almost in a trance. My work had been so automatic, so instinctive, that I had been unaware of the passage of time. I had been caught in the flow of some indefinable force and had been swept along in a creative frenzy, which was as effective as it was mysterious.

For the drawing was good. It had a chilling horror to it that was breathtaking. The human, yet inhuman fig-

ure, crouching along the path, lying in wait like some savage jungle creature. Lying in wait . . .

Lying in wait for what?  
I didn't know.

WITH a shake of my head I tried to dislodge the thoughts that were battering at my consciousness. A mist seemed to rise from my eyes and mind and I found myself looking at the drawing through clear eyes. I *had* been in a kind of self-induced hypnotic state. The emotional outlet that occurred with creative work, might have the effect of dulling one's more ordinary perceptions.

Everything was very quiet. I glanced across the court and saw that my subject's room was dark. I wondered when he had left.

I took the drawing from the board then and sealed it in a special size envelope, for I had decided to mail this drawing in to Saunders. I didn't intend to go back to *Republic* for a day or so and postage was the quickest and cheapest way of getting the picture to him.

I mailed the drawing that night. Two days later, about ten o'clock in the morning, I entered Saunders' office.

He sprang to his feet when he saw me and walked around his desk to pump my hand.

"Glad to see you," he said, fairly bristling with camaraderie.

"What did you think of the picture I sent in?" I asked. I had an idea of what he would say.

"Terrific!" he exploded. "Absolutely terrific! I've been looking for material like that for years. It was so damn convincing it almost scared the life out of me when I took it out of the envelope. Realistic? Boy!"

"Thanks," I said. My lack of enthusiasm must have been quite noticeable, for he said,

"Why so gloomy? You haven't a thing in the world to worry about now. Your style is right in the groove at last, and as long as you use the daily newspapers, you'll never have to worry about your background and scenes."

"The newspapers?" I said. A chill feeling crept gradually over me, bringing with it a nameless illogical horror. I had done nothing to be afraid of, my actions were, so far as I knew, blameless. Yet I felt suddenly like cringing into the darkest corner of the room I could find.

"Why, yes, the newspapers." Saunders laughed in answer to my questioning tone. "You remember that first illustration you did, based on the hatchet murder at the wharf?"

"I didn't get that illustration idea from the newspaper story," I said, and my voice was tonelessly flat.

Saunders grinned and stuck a cigarette into his mouth.

"I believed you the first time when you said that, but not any more. This last picture you did was taken smack from the Jackson Heights murder, wasn't it?"

"No, no," I said. I was trembling slightly, and the words came out in a stuttering rush.

"Don't get excited about it," Saunders said, but he looked at me rather queerly. "If you want to protect your source of ideas, that's perfectly okay. As I said once, it doesn't matter to me where the hell you get your inspiration. But this last case was pretty obvious."

A horrible premonition was creeping over me.

"Let me see my last illustration," I said. I tried desperately to control my voice, to check the hysteria that was mounting in my breast.

"Sure thing," Saunders said. "I haven't given it to an author yet. It's right here."

HE WALKED over to a long open file beside his desk and pulled out an illustration pasted against a cardboard background. He set it on his desk, flicked a strong light against it.

"There it is," he said; "a beautiful job."

I stared at the illustration and I tried to speak, but it was impossible. My mouth was dry with horror that was as deep as the pit of hell.

My heart was pounding slowly, heavily, painfully.

The illustration had been changed. It was not the same drawing that I had mailed to Saunders two nights before. The background was the same, vacant lot, bungalows with lighted fronts, but—

The figure of the hulking evil brute had changed! Instead of crouching behind the shrubbery that lined the lot's pathway, he was kneeling on the prone figure of an elderly man, and his mighty hands were closed about his neck.

My character, the character that had been inspired by the man across the court from my studio, was committing another murder. The expression of lustful brutality on his face was sickening.

"It's not pretty," Saunders said, "but it's effective as hell. You can't deny that you got the idea for that illustration from the Jackson Heights murder."

"What happened at Jackson Heights?" I asked dully.

Saunders looked at me as if I were losing my mind.

"Are you kidding?" he demanded. "The papers have been full of nothing else for the last forty-eight hours. Seems some elderly duck was crossing a lot out in Jackson Heights, and some madman attacked and killed him. Broke his neck in two places. It was a very nasty mess. What's the matter

with you?"

"Nothing, nothing at all. I haven't been feeling so well the last few days," I said weakly. I leaned against the edge of his desk for support. "Answer me one question, please, Harry. Did you see this illustration of mine, immediately after it was taken from the envelope?"

"Of course," he answered. "I opened the envelope. Why?"

"The scene was just as it is now?" I said, clenching my hands nervously. "You haven't made any—changes?"

"Naturally not," Saunders said. "This is the way the picture arrived and this is the way we're going to use it. No one has touched it. You can see that at a glance. Every bit of that picture is your work. It stands out all over it."

"Thanks," I said. My mind was in a seething turmoil. "I've got to be leaving now. Thanks again."

"Keep up the good work," Saunders said. He laughed. "We want realism in the art work here. And I don't care if you commit the murders yourself, they've got to be real. So long."

I SHUDDERED as I left his office.

I felt as if I might be sick. My thoughts were churning wildly. When I reached my studio hours later, after tramping endlessly the city streets, I collapsed in the chair before my drawing board, and stared at the drawing paper with dazed sightless eyes. I had to think. But my brain was numb with horror. This whole nightmarish business was so incomprehensible, so mysterious, so damnably incredible that my reason rebelled at accepting the conclusions my instinct presented.

Who had changed the last illustration? That was an unanswerable question. Could it be that there was some psychic connection between that drawing and the brutal murder of an old

man in Jackson Heights?

Could it have been a human agency?

I buried my head in my hands and groaned in the empty darkness of the room. I had mailed that picture to Saunders as soon as I had completed it. My theory in regard to the first picture would not apply in this second instance. It couldn't have been an act I unknowingly performed in my sleep—because the illustration was not in the studio that night; it was in the city post office.

How long I sat in the dark of my studio I have no way of knowing, but after a while I became aware of a light in the room across the court. How long it had been on, I couldn't say.

I stared across the court into the lighted room and I saw the man who had inspired both of my illustrations. He was sitting in a chair facing the window, in almost the same position I was sitting. But he did not seem to be looking at me.

Rather he was staring past, or through me. How long he had been sitting there was a conjectural matter. His dark brutal face was half in the shadow, and his small burning eyes were almost concealed by lowered lids.

On his heavy loose lips I could see the light reflecting from a slaver's wetness. I stared at him for several minutes, and gradually the compulsion to draw came over me in an irresistible wave.

I turned to my board and picked up a pencil. There was enough light from his window for me to see by, and I went to work, furiously, feverishly.

I wasn't sure what I was drawing. My pencil moved almost independently of my will. My mind, my reason, seemed curiously separate and apart from the figure and background that swiftly developed on the drawing paper.

I felt as if I were watching the scene objectively, but taking no part in it myself.

I saw the pencil moving, but I felt it moved of itself. I heard its faint scratch as it moved over the paper, but it was a far away sound. The darkness of the room, the quietness of the night, the stillness of the air, these things seemed real and tangible, but the drawing was an abstraction apart from me.

In spite of my detachment, I could feel the power and the force of the indefinable inspiration that had seized my will and intellect and drove them on at such a feverish haste.

What was I drawing?

**I** FORCED myself to look at my work. It was *him*. I had drawn him in a standing position, but I hadn't completed his background.

A tenseness was creeping into my fingers, but I worked on desperately. I felt suddenly excited and exhilarated. I glanced across the court and, although the light was still blazing, the man had left the window.

I wheeled back to the drawing board and worked with redoubled speed. Everything depended on finishing this drawing. Why, I didn't know.

"I must, I must!" I said aloud.

Now I seemed to sweep along on a wave that was hurling me forward with increasing speed each second. My hand moved so quickly that my eyes could not follow it, and the background of the main figure was swiftly falling into place. In a minute I would be through. Even as that thought came to me I knew a moment of black horror.

Sheer black horror of the unknown, of the nameless, of all that dread darkness which man is ever fleeing.

*In a moment the picture would be completed!*

My instinct screamed at me to hurl the pencil from my fingers, to rip the sheet from the board, but my hand moved on, inexorably, inevitably, be-

yond the control of my will.

The last strokes were completed in a frantic rush.

I was through!

There was a complete, terrible silence in the room. I studied the illustration I had just completed, and gradually the mist lifted from my mind and sanity returned slowly.

I had drawn *him* standing in a doorway. In his knotted fist was an axe.

I shook my head slowly. I felt as if I were coming up for air, after hours of swimming helplessly through suffocating water.

The picture I had drawn was of a familiar scene. It was so familiar that for a moment I was unable to place it. I frowned and studied the illustration carefully.

Suddenly a cold, nauseating horror shook me.

"My God!" I whispered.

*The scene I had depicted was that of my own studio!*

I leaned forward, hardly daring to believe my eyes. But my eyes had not lied. A convulsive shudder shook my frame as I stared at that scene depicted on the drawing board.

I had drawn my own studio as the setting for *his* next crime!

Suddenly, in the still black silence of the room, I heard a board creak faintly.

I froze into immobility. My heart pounded madly.

The board creaked again . . . closer.

I fought back the scream that tore against my throat. With a courage that I did not dream I possessed, I wheeled suddenly and faced the door.

HE WAS there — just as I had drawn him.

Mad, burning eyes, slaving jaws, rasping breath . . . he stood in the doorway, mighty shoulders hunched, a hand clenched about the handle of an axe.

With a white flash of understanding I *knew* why I had drawn the picture of my studio, lured this monster here. In some psychic way his actions and my illustrations were linked inseparably. I was his next victim! It was only right that I should be.

*His* heavy breathing was the only sound in the room. Then a board creaked and I knew he had stepped closer.

I knew he was ready to lunge. My feet dug into the floor, as I saw the gleaming head of the axe flash over his head.

Then he lunged!

I sprang sideways from the chair and his great bulk sprawled over me. The axe cut through the air and crashed into the drawing table. I heard a horrible gurgling sound, as I pulled myself to my knees.

There was a black bulk on the floor of the studio. The axe lay near the body, its head dull with a sticky redness.

I staggered to my feet and turned on the light. *He* was lying on the floor in a pool of his own blood. His head was almost severed from his body.

My eyes moved to the drawing board.

*His* axe had slashed through the illustration I had just drawn. *His* figure in the drawing was almost decapitated by the four inch rent the axe had made in the paper.

The other figure in the drawing was untouched. I was the other figure.

THE END



There was a blasting explosion, and the laboratory rang with yells of alarm

# The Stygian Terror

by STANTON A. COBLENTZ

Visitors from another world might be a lot of bother—but when they can be made into tires, welcome! That is, unless they object





FROM the moment he joined the staff of the Randolph Crocker Research Laboratories, Jim Dudd was the butt of sly digs and laughter.

It was not only that his name could never be heard without provoking a chuckle; it was that he was such a strange, different sort of chap, who usually kept to himself and didn't know how to mix with the boys. I well remember the first moment I saw him: the small, lean form, not over five feet three; the disproportionately large head, with the huge basket-shaped ears and the great shock of bristling flame-colored hair; the neck collarless, the sagging shoulders untidily supporting a suit several sizes too large, and the big blue spectacled eyes that seemed to

crackle as he fairly burst through the door and asked the way to the Manager's office.

"My name's Dudd," he introduced himself, in one of the heaviest bass voices I had ever heard. "I'm to have charge of the synthetic products."

To the rest of us it seemed preposterous that this youth—for he did not look a day over twenty-three—should be entrusted with so important a post as the synthetic products. "Well, the boss sure has picked a dud!" was our favorite comment. It may have been jeal-

ousy, since we were all years older; but we were so convinced of Jim's utter worthlessness that we didn't make any effort to meet his friendly advances. Instead, we would play all sorts of tricks, such as to hide his test-tubes and vials of acid, and to steal the papers on which he had been working out his elaborate formulae. It would amuse us enormously to see how he would shake his fists, and go stalking about the laboratory, a hantam figure bawling deep threats of vengeance.

All this lasted about three months. It was not until after the beginning of the Stygian invasion, sometime in the late summer, that our attitude began to change.

The details of this extraordinary episode, of course, are well known. It was in mid-July that some curious creatures—called "Stygians" because of their pitch-black bodies—were discovered on the plains of western Kansas. Four or five feet long, they had slim weasel-like bodies, and yet were unrelated to the weasel or any other terrestrial vertebrate. At first the reports were so wild as to be dismissed as incredible: that they were each six-limbed, with two sets of three six-fingered hands; that their bulbous heads were distinguished by three eyes; that they wore short, almost metallic bristles instead of hair; and that, when wounded they exuded a thick milky fluid! Yet all these statements, fantastic as they appeared, were confirmed by the world's leading scientists.

In other words, the Stygians were not earth-beings at all! Their existence could be explained only by their arrival from some other planet! And, indeed, fragments of some sort of plastic space-cars were found, proving that the creatures had come from Jupiter, Mars or Venus, though their exact origin was never determined. Where-

ever they came from, however, they seemed able to acclimate themselves to the Kansas environment; they lived on the air and the soil, which, like plants, they could synthesize into food; and they built multitudes of conical bouses, projecting fifty feet above ground, and sheltering multitudes of their kind.

As far as we could see, these creatures were harmless. From the time of H. G. Wells we had taken it for granted that an invasion from another world, if it ever came, would be fraught with unspeakable menace. And there it was, inoffensive as if a few jackrabbits had settled on the waste places of the earth!

Yet actually the menace was there, concealed but potent, though for a long while we did not see it. Meanwhile it remained for Jim Dudd—yes, for none other than our despised Jim Dudd!—to show how the Stygians could be put to practical use.

## II

WE ALL wondered why it was that a huge crate, marked with a Kansas point of origin, reached the laboratories one day, addressed to "James A. Dudd, Esq." And we all crowded about eagerly as he unpacked the box and brought to view—of all things!—half a dozen weasel-shaped six-legged carcasses! Yes, Stygians!—dead Stygians!—and we all pressed around more eagerly still, though we shuddered a little as we peered at the repulsive-looking black creatures with their glassy green eyes glaring malevolently even in death.

"What you want with 'em?" I put the natural question.

"What you s'pose I want?" Dudd flashed back. "Going to do a little experimenting, that's all!"

This provoked a round of laughter

from the boys. And our merriment only grew as the days went by and Dudd passed all his time bent over those Stygian corpses with a microscope and scalpels. "Dudd's sweethearts!" we called the gruesome relics; and we never did cease joking about the way he collected the sticky white fluid from their bodies, boiled it, strained it, boiled it again, poured it in moulds, and mixed it with no end of reagents.

"What do you think? Expecting to bring 'em back to life?" we laughed. But what surprised us was not so much Dudd's eccentric behavior, as that the boss permitted him to waste his time so senselessly.

However, as it turned out, the joke was not on him.

One day I happened to be staying in late, finishing work on a new arsenic spray, for wartime use against the enemy . . . when I looked up from my test-tubes to observe that I was alone in the laboratory with Dudd. He was, as usual, bending intently over one of his queer concoctions at the table opposite mine; and I could not, in my unconcealed contempt for him, forbear throwing out a sarcastic, "Well, Dudd, discovered something epoch-making?"

He looked up at me with an expression of startled innocence. The light threw a queer glint, I thought, from the heavy lenses that covered his near-sighted eyes.

"Why, yes, I *have* discovered something epoch-making," he answered, in the same tones in which he might have said, "Nice weather we're having today."

"The devil you bave!"

"Come here, I'll show you!"

I still could not keep a scornful smile from my lips; but instantly I was at his side.

He thrust into my hands a fragment of a smooth white substance, which,

somehow, was peculiarly warm and unpleasant to the touch.

"Examine it!"

I did as directed, but with a growing conviction that something was wrong with Dudd's head.

"Well," I confessed, "I can't see that it's anything but ordinary rubber."

His blue eyes blazed. "Ordinary rubber?" he flung back at me, almost indignantly. "I should say *not*! Why, notice its resiliency, won't you! It has twice the elasticity of ordinary rubber, and yet is firmer than the best India product. It's super-rubber, that's what it is!"

I ATTEMPTED no reply. Best to let the idiot rave!

"Yes, it's super-rubber!" he went on, bobbing up and down the room in unsuppressed excitement, while pounding his fists in the air with characteristic vehemence. "It's more than super-rubber! It's the solution of our tire problem! Now that the route to the Indies has been cut off, the arrival of the Stygians has been providential!"

"Stygians?" I threw back, forgetting his experiments. "What have they to do with it?"

"Everything! Everything! Why, when I first read of that sticky white fluid coming from their bodies, I wondered if it couldn't be adapted to commercial use. That's why I wrote to my old chum Mortimer Blythe back in Kansas, and got him to shoot and ship me several of the beasts. The results surpassed all expectations. The white fluid, which is their blood, is chemically very close to the best grade of latex—yes, but better than any latex! Those marvelous animals—why, they're rubber reservoirs of the highest order!"

I merely gaped. Although still half convinced that Dudd was crazy, I was beginning to feel my first glimmer of

respect for him.

"You know how, all through this damned war, we've been at wit's ends to get rubber enough," he went on. "But now we don't need to worry. Luckily, the Stygians have come to earth by the thousands. We'll organize shooting and trapping expeditions to capture car-loads of them. I've arranged with Mr. Crocker to have them shipped here to our laboratories—"

"But the problem of transportation to the Atlantic seaboard—"

"It's unimportant, in the experimental stages. Later we can transplant the Stygians here—regular Stygian farms, where they can be bred commercially. If all goes well—and I'm certain it will—we'll see the end of tire rationing!"

I knew that if the plan had been endorsed by Randolph Crocker, who was the coolest-headed, most practical-minded scientist I knew, then it was no mere crack-brained notion. For the first time, I was faced with the stunning idea that Dudd was not the addle-pated fool we had taken him to be; that he was, perhaps, a genius in disguise! Certainly, the specimen which he showed me had seemed to be good rubber. Yet, strangely, as I considered drawing our supply of the vital commodity from the bodies of the Stygians, a shudder passed over me—a feeling of revulsion, of apprehension, almost of horror, as if we were unconsciously scraping the surface of something forbidden, inimical, disastrous.

### III

NOTHING, however, seemed to justify my misgivings—nothing, at least, during the next month or two. Our hostility to Dudd had not vanished, but was mixed with a sort of admiring wonder as we saw him placed in charge of a whole building, an annex adjoining

the regular laboratories; while the bodies of slaughtered Stygians were brought in by the tons—yes, by the hundreds of tons! There was a carefully guarded storehouse at the rear of the laboratories, where the products of the research were being piled up, and though armed sentinels watched the approaches, it was no secret what they contained: huge ever-growing piles of superb-looking white tires!

It was, likewise, no secret that some of those tires had been fitted to trucks connected with the laboratory, and were already in daily use. And did they hold up well? "You just call me a howling baboon, Mr. Talbot, if they don't hold up!" Dudd enthused one evening when I put the question. "Why, they roll over the rockiest terrain, and hardly show a sign of wear! If they won't do two hundred thousand miles, they won't do an inch! You just see! By the end of the week, our experiments will be over, and Mr. Crocker will make an extraordinary announcement!"

But, as it turned out, the announcement was never made. For, on the very next day, we were startled by the first of the series of disasters that made it seem as if, after all, we had been justified in our jokes as to Dudd's surname.

First came the news of an accident to one of Crocker's trucks. Or perhaps the word "accident" does not do justice to what happened: the entire vehicle blew up as if hit by a TNT bomb. It was at a remote suburban intersection, and there were no witnesses; but windows in houses half a mile away were shattered, while the entire front of a nearby home caved in. Of the truck and its driver scarcely a fragment remained; and as the machine had not been known to carry any explosives, no plausible explanation of

the tragedy could be offered.

We were still reeling from the impact of the news when other grim tidings reached us. A small roadster, used by Assistant Manager Bywater in making his calls about town, had blown up under equally mysterious circumstances. The known facts were similar; the car had simply gone up in a blast of thunder, as if dynamite had been touched off; and no recognizable trace could be found either of the roadster or of the Assistant Manager.

When a third catastrophe occurred on the following day and Randolph Crocker's private car along with his chauffeur disappeared in a puff of smoke, we felt it more than time to launch an inquiry. It was then that Crocker, who fortunately had left his limousine shortly before the disaster, gave orders forbidding the further use of the plant's cars. And it was then that Dudd, bustling about with feverish activity, began to conduct a new series of experiments.

THAT the experiments succeeded I can testify from personal experience. Late that afternoon I was just about to leave the laboratory, when from the direction of Dudd's table there came a flash of light accompanied by a detonation that almost knocked me off my feet. And as, staggering, I attempted to regain my balance, I had a glimpse of Dudd himself, his apron discolored with acid, his eyes wild and glaring, his face streaked and smeared with blood.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. "Now I know what's what!"

The rest of us came crowding about him, ready to offer first aid.

But furiously he waved us away. "Don't care about me! I'm all right!" he cried, looking far from all right with his neck streaked by blood-rills, his

flaming dishevelled hair, and quaking agitated manner. "The Lord be praised! I got it to explode!"

Questions as to his sanity were once more uppermost in our minds as we stared at the wrecked laboratory table strewn with fragments of broken equipment.

"Yes, I got it to explode! Now I know just what's the matter with my Stygian rubber. The damned stuff's worthless!"

We had reached the same conclusion, but discreetly said nothing.

"It's worse than worthless!" he went on, tossing his great head fiercely. "It's more dangerous than a time-bomb! Blasted idiot that I was, not to find out before!"

His last remark was one that we could quite agree with, but we remained silent.

"I've just established," he rushed on, "that the molecular composition of Stygian rubber is extremely unstable. In a state of repose, the substance will last forever; but under successive shocks, such as a tire receives when in use, the delicate molecular balance is gradually upset, until at last the equilibrium is overthrown entirely, and the molecules disintegrate into their basic gases, separating with eruptive fury—in plain English, making a bell of an explosion."

"Just so," I acknowledged, feeling a faint malicious sense of triumph. "So your Stygian rubber—to put things bluntly—has been a blank failure."

The smile with which he met this charge was not that of a defeated man. Wiping the blood from his cheeks with a torn sleeve, he beamed upon me ingratiatingly from those near-sighted big blue eyes of his. "Oh, I wouldn't say that," he returned, enigmatically. "Maybe I'll still be able to put it to use. Just you wait, and see!"

## IV

WHY the boss didn't fire Dudd after the debacle of the Stygian rubber was more than we could say. Also, we couldn't understand why the warehouse of Stygian tires hadn't been destroyed, instead of being left untouched, and, in fact, carefully guarded night and day. However, we didn't trouble our heads about such trifles, though we had no end of fun at Dudd's expense, flinging sly gibes and never ceasing to taunt him about his "friends the Stygians."

About a week after the explosions, Dudd began to be absent from the laboratory for long periods. When he returned, he would look bleary-eyed and nervous, with a strange far-away expression, and would pay little attention to his work. Sometimes he would be summoned to Crocker's office for long conferences; and, upon emerging, would pass us with the unnoticing, starry look of one who treads another planet. Was his insanity getting progressively worse?

I did not, however, believe certain stories that began to be whispered. I thought Joe Pelham, our expert in hydro-carbons, had been drinking too heavily when he made the charge, "Who you think I passed on the street last night? No one but our old pal Dudd! Yes sirree, saw him down near the end of Westbrook Avenue, in a lonely spot where you wouldn't have looked to see a soul! He was talking in whispers, and was linked arm in arm, who do you think with? Why, I'll swear it was nobody but Oscar Strubel!"

The name of Oscar Strubel had been much in the papers of late. Accused of being an enemy agent, he was now under trial, and was out on ten thousand dollars bail. Certainly, if Dudd kept such company, he was something far worse than the joke we had thought

him! But I was still unwilling to believe it.

I was unwilling to believe even when, from another source, I was told that Dudd had been seen escaping through a side door when the police invaded a meeting of the "Friends of the Fuehrer"—a notorious group of plotters and gangsters. Mistakes of identity are easily made; hence, while I was the last man to dispute that Dudd was a fool or a lunatic, I still could not persuade myself that he would stoop to treason.

But when can one say when presented with irrefutable evidence? Imagine my astonishment one morning when these words glared at me from the front page of the *Daily Standard-Herald*!—

#### NAZI SUSPECT ARRESTED POLICE RAID APARTMENT Dudd Taken Into Custody

"James A. Dudd, a chemist employed by the Randolph Crocker Research Laboratories, was placed under arrest late yesterday by Detectives Sheridan and O'Byrne. Secret documents of the 'Friends of the Fuehrer,' along with a large framed portrait of the Fuehrer himself and other incriminating evidence, were found in his possession. Interviewed at the Harbor Jail by a reporter of the *Standard-Herald*, he has refused to make any statement. Justice Goodrun, it was authoritatively learned, has denied him bail. The date of the trial has not yet been set."

"Always did say there was something phoney about that guy!" was the consensus of opinion at the laboratories when the news was passed about. But what we still could not understand was that so astute a man as Crocker had employed Dudd—had not seen through him.

However, our attention was soon to be diverted to events of an even more astonishing nature.

## V

ON THE very night after Dudd's arrest, the raid on the Randolph Crocker Laboratories occurred. The nation was, to put it mildly, utterly at a loss to understand how it could have happened; for weeks it was a leading subject of discussion wherever one went. First of all, how was it that our armed forces had been so little on the alert that an enemy raider could approach our coast undetected? Secondly, how had the raiding vessel—whether a surface craft, or a submarine—been able to make its way unmolested up Creston Inlet, where the Crocker plant was located? It was evident that the marauders had been provided with maps of the country; evident, furthermore, that our side had been asleep. Not the least astounding part of the story was that they had confined their visit to the warehouse at the rear of the laboratories, which they had entered with the boldest assurance after overpowering the guards. It was officially admitted that they had stripped the place bare, and had borne off huge supplies of Stygian rubber tires, as well as quantities of raw Stygian rubber. They had made their get-away with their booty before dawn, and had left without a trace.

No one, during the ensuing turmoil of investigation, thought of connecting the raid with the Dudd affair. And no one saw any relation between it and the reports that began to seep out of enemy territory only a few weeks later. Scores of disastrous explosions had occurred, according to these accounts. Heavy trucks, laden with munitions, had blown up. Several four-motored

bombing planes had disappeared in flame and smoke just as their landing gear hit the ground on their return from practice flights. A whole motor troop train had been wrecked. An automobile, exploding near the Ministry of Supply, had demolished the building. Other accidents had been equally damaging; while even more startling was the injury to morale, which was severely shaken by the series of unexplained blasts.

We also were mystified—although somehow this marked the turning point of the war, and thenceforth the enemy progressively went to pieces. But it was not until months later, after our victory had been assured, that the truth came out. Then it was that, in amazement, I read the following in the *Standard-Herald*:

DUDD RELEASED FROM  
CUSTODY  
ARREST REVEALED AS HOAX  
Tells of Extraordinary Conspiracy

"Revealing that he had been serving the Government in a remote part of the country, James A. Dudd returned to town yesterday, after having supposedly been in prison as a suspected Nazi agent. Dudd had a remarkable tale to tell, which may now be imparted for the first time. . . ."

There followed a passage describing his invention of Stygian rubber, and its explosive qualities. But I raced on to read:

"Possessed of a warehouse of tires more dangerous than dynamite, Dudd was advised to destroy them, but had a better idea. After consulting with his employer, Randolph Crocker, he joined the F.B.I., and, aided by an excellent speaking knowledge of German acquired during several years abroad, began to frequent the society of Nazi

agents; attended their meetings; professed allegiance to their principles; and told them about the Stygian tires—everything, that is, except that they would explode. As the Nazis were suffering from a rubber shortage even more acute than our own, he broached a scheme for the seizure of the tires by an enemy raiding party; cautioned the American authorities against interfering; and, with consummate skill, plotted every phase of the undertaking. At the last moment, he had himself arrested, so as to hush away any possible doubt on the Nazis' part as to his loyalty to their cause, and to provide himself with an excuse for not dashing away with the raiders, as he had promised.

"The enemy fell beautifully into the trap. They secured the tires, and of course got away without any serious attempt on our part to stop them. Reaching a home port, they unsuspectingly put their hooty to use—which accounts for the series of explosions that

have destroyed munition-laden trucks, airplanes, and military installations.

"Dudd, it has been revealed, has been recommended by the army for the Distinguished Service Medal. The authorities are conducting further investigations of his Stygian rubber, which, they believe, will make a more valuable explosive than TNT."

With this report still fresh in mind, I returned on the following day to the laboratory, to find Dudd back at his old bench. I could hardly bear the thought that he, whom we had taken for a fool, a madman and a traitor, had really turned out to be a hero. Yet he met me with a disarming smile. "Mighty good to be back with friends, Mr. Talhott!" he said. And though I didn't know if these words were sarcasm or the genuine thing, he continued to smile happily, and bent over his crucibles and retorts with the intent interest of one to whom the Stygian episode had been a mere incident, now forgotten.

## FIGHTING CHAMPION OF THE DEEP

**T**HE piranha fish of South America is probably the fiercest fish in the whole world. This is all the more amazing when you consider that the fish is only about a foot long, but what it lacks in size it makes up with its terrible ferocity and the great numbers in which it travels. The piranha resembles a bass or sunfish in body form since it is short, broad, and laterally compressed. It lives in almost every stream east of the Andes from Venezuela south to Paraguay, but prefers the waters above and below a waterfall.

These carnivorous fish are without fear and will attack anything and everything that dares enter their home without any regard to the size of the intruder. The piranhas are especially attracted by blood and only a few drops in the water in the vicinity of the piranhas will bring them in droves. Hunters say that if a wounded bird or animal falls or runs into a pool of piranha fish, the mammal will have the flesh picked clean from its bones and all that will remain of the bird is its feathers.

The fish will also eat other foods such as fruits, seeds, bread, but they prefer living flesh. They will even attack a man, especially if his body has a small cut. Many stories are told of natives and explorers who have lost a toe, a finger, or huge chunks from their body after being at-

tacked by these fish. If a person is ever so unfortunate as to fall into a pool of piranha while unconscious or stunned, the fish will pick his bones clean of flesh; unless he revives immediately his chances of escape are practically hopeless.

Since the piranhas are very edible, sportsmen and natives fish for them frequently. The only successful method of catching them is to use a long line with a wire leader and allowing the bait to sink almost to the bottom of the stream. Without a wire leader, the fish will cut the line in every instance with their teeth. The piranha, when safely hooked, does not have much fight left in him, but it is one thing to land him and another thing to take him off the hook. The piranha is as dangerous in a boat as it is in the water. If the fisherman is not careful when he takes the fish off the hook, the piranha will snap off a finger.

The piranha is especially treacherous since it will lie perfectly still until some part of the fisherman's body is close enough and then he'll snap out to bite. The only safe method of handling the piranha is to club them until unconscious and then remove the hook.

The teeth of the piranha are so razor-sharp that the natives often carry the lower jaw of a piranha fish with them as their knife.



# FANTASTIC BOTANY

By ROLAND BIRCHLY

**Maybe you'll begin looking with suspicion on all plants and trees after you read this, but it's true!**

## LAZY CORN

**L**AZY corn is a very interesting example of a freak of nature. Unlike normal corn which grows erect, lazy corn sprawls flat on the ground. This curiosity, caused by a hereditary defect, has been explained by Dr. John Shafer, Jr., of Cornell University.

When a normal cornstalk is placed horizontally, about 60% of its auxin, the hormone which promotes growth, becomes concentrated on the lower side of the stalk. This causes that side to grow more quickly and forces the stalk to curve upward until it is in a normal position.

However, this condition is reversed in lazy corn which concentrates about 55% of its auxin on the upper side of the stalk. This forces the stalk to remain in its prostrate position.

\* \* \*

## THE MANCHINEEL TREE

**A**LTHOUGH Nature is usually very benevolent, she has also given us many plants that will only harm people, never doing any good. Such a plant is the Manchineel tree of the West Indies—one of the most poisonous of all the American plants.

It is so very dangerous that water that has only come into contact with its deadly leaves can cause painful burns and blisters when touched by human skin. Persons who have gone swimming in water near the deadly tree have been known to die from the poisonous effects of the water. Others have met a similar fate when they, unknowingly, took shelter under the tree during a tropical rainstorm.

Even the fruit of the Manchineel tree, although it resembles an innocent green apple, is full of a very deadly poison. Natives are all familiar with this murderer and tourists are instructed in how to recognize the tree and warned to stay away.

\* \* \*

## ANOTHER SOYBEAN PRODUCT

**T**O THE hundreds of uses for the soybean, a plant that was considered worthless not so many years ago, researchers at the Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station at Madison have added a new use. They have discovered that by mixing three parts of soybean flour with one part of pollen they can produce a bread unexcelled for feeding bees during the winter months.

To collect the necessary pollen, the experimenters placed two screens, made of ordinary wire

cloth, five wires to the inch, at the entrance to the beehives one-half inch apart. As the bees passed through these screens to enter their hives, the pollen that had clung to their legs during the day was brushed off and collected in trays placed beneath the screens. This pollen is added to the soybean flour and sugar syrup to form a thick paste. Each bee colony requires about a half pound of this paste each week.

\* \* \*

## MAKING USE OF THE OSAGE ORANGE

**J**OHAN M. RAMSBOTTOM, of Chicago, Illinois, has patented a process to make meats tender by means of an extract from the osage orange tree. He claims that the fruit, fresh leaves, stems, and roots of the tree can produce an enzyme called macin, which can tenderize almost immediately, doing away with the storage of meat for a long period for natural tenderizing.

All the meat packer will have to do is dip the tough meat in an aqueous solution of enzyme and the macin will act on the beef protein to tenderize the meat. The inventor even claims that the enzyme solution can be pumped under pressure into the arterial system of the animal carcass to tenderize all the meat in the carcass at one time.

\* \* \*

## PUTTING POTATOES BACK IN MADAME'S DIET

**I**NSTEAD of having to pass up the potatoes at supper, madam may soon be able to partake of that delicacy now forbidden to all who are anxious to keep their slim figure. According to George H. Chisholm, superintendent and horticulturist at the Greystone estate of the late Samuel Untermyer, Yonkers, New York, a tomato plant has been successfully grafted onto a potato plant to produce a potato that is starchless.

This new variety of vegetable will be called the topato and can be eaten by women from sixteen to sixty without having to worry about their waistline.

The topatoes grow from the roots of the plants like an ordinary potato and the upper growth of the plants produce tomatoes. The successful experiment consisted of grafting tomato plants to the tops of ordinary Irish potato plants. The twelve experimental plants, kept in a greenhouse, were grown in gravel without soil. Twice a day, Mr. Chisholm would "feed" the plants with magnesium sulphate and six other chemicals.

# SHARBEAU'S STARTLING STATUE

by CLEE GARSON



"I swear it to you, Monsieur, as  
I stand there, the statue moves!"

**M**ONSIEUR PAUL SHARBEAU is a friendly, amusing, easy going little man with the emotional temperament of a poodle. He has small, dark, dancing little eyes, the expected little black moustache—waxed at the tips of course—and an utterly blasé disdain for the mysteries of life.

I was not surprised, therefore, to hear his voice coming excitedly over the telephone that night pleading shrilly that I come to his modest residence immediately for "some wine and ze convair-sation." Not surprised even though it was after midnight and most normal people were in bed, Sharbeau had often, merely on impulse, called me at ungodly hours when he felt in the need for wine and companionship.

I was very much surprised, however, at his closing remark over the telephone when I had finally assured him I would be over as quickly as I could.

"Clee," he had concluded, "you know vairee much about ze occult, no?"

And before I had been able to frame a suitable reply to this, he had signed off.

"Zat is good. Zat is vairee good!"

I sat there looking at the telephone in my hand, the *click* still reverberating in my ears. Sat there frowning in perplexity over the fire-cracker conclusion of my little French friend.

Sharbeau's impression that I was an authority on matters of the occult had undoubtedly been born of several conversations we'd had in which I'd confessed that I had a cursory interest in things supernatural which amounted to nothing really more than a hobby. Been born of that, no doubt, plus the fact that I'd mentioned Poe to be my favorite author, and had myself turned out an occasional yarn of fantasy-horror.

I sighed, wondering irritably what on earth had been the cause of Sharbeau's sudden concern with a subject toward which he had previously expressed indifference.

Then I remembered that Sharbeau possessed an excellent wine stock which he had managed to smuggle out of France shortly after the Vichy sell-out convinced him his life would no longer be safe under German domination. Remembered, and forgot my irritation.

**IT was a weird thing that was happening. A statue that moved, and for a truly amazing reason!**



For excellent wine was excellent wine. Even at a quarter past midnight. And Sharbeau was an interesting enough chap conversationally, and might, after all, have unearthed some occult evidence which I might regret missing.

I thumbed my nose at the typewriter, put away the chapter I'd been polishing, and got my coat . . .

Monsieur Sharbeau lived in an old brownstone residence on the near North Side. One of those buildings remodeled into spacious, four room, kitchenette apartments. Sharbeau had converted one of the rooms, the one with the wood-burning fireplace, into a sort of library-study. We engaged in most of our conversational and wine bouts there.

He met me at the door, obviously in a state of great agitation about something, and before I'd scarcely had time to remove my coat, he led me immediately into his study.

There was the ever ready hottle of rare vintage waiting on a thick, mahogany table between two glasses, and as I found an easy chair Sharbeau immediately placed a filled glass in my hand and poured himself a drink. His face was flushed, his dark eyes button bright.

"You will nevair believe what it is I 'ave to tell you," he said, downing his drink in jerky haste.

"Sit down and tell me about it," I suggested. I raised the wine to my lips, savoring the delicious bouquet before taking a sip. Rare stuff, and potent.

Sharbeau ignored my suggestion. He strode over to the mantel above the fireplace.

"Regard!" he said dramatically.

I FOLLOWED his pointing finger. There was nothing atop the mantel but a stone statue—one that had been

there on every occasion I could remember—some fourteen inches high. It was the statue of a Greek warrior in an attitude suggesting he was running.

I made my voice tactfully polite.

"It's a very nice statue. A very nice statue indeed. I've noticed it every time I've been here. Often intended to comment on it. What about it?"

Sharbeau closed his eyes for an instant, drawing in a shuddery breath.

"You notice nozzing unusual about it?"

I shook my head. "I don't know exactly what you mean."

"I mean since you are regarding it ze last time you are here."

Again I shook my head. "No, Sharbeau. I'm sorry. I never noticed it very carefully before. If something's happened to it, if it's broken, I'm terribly sorry."

Sharbeau seemed suddenly to realize his glass was empty. He stepped over to the table and filled it to the brim again. Once more he downed the liquid in a quick gulp. A strange procedure for one as fond of fine wines as my little friend.

He stepped back to the mantel, pointing a finger again at the statue. And again there was the same throbbing drama in his voice.

"Regard!"

I was getting badly confused.

"Perhaps you'd better be explicit," I said. "I told you be—"

"Ze limb of ze statue," Sharbeau said, "ze right limb, is forward!"

I saw what he meant. In the running attitude of the figure, its right leg was stretched out ahead of the left. But so what?

Sharbeau interpreted my expression. "Alllways," he said, "it was ze left limb forward!"

I perked up a little.

"Are you certain of that?" I de-

manded. "Are you positive that the left leg of that thing was always stretched out in front of the right?"

Sharbeau nodded. "But of course. I 'ave ze statue ten years. It is one of my favorites. I know every contour of it. Every line!"

His finger suddenly shot up to point to the face the running figure.

"Regard!" he exclaimed again.

"All right," I told him instantly. "I see what you're driving at. What changes do you think have occurred in the facial expression of the statue?"

Sharbeau stared at me somberly. "Alllways," he said, "ze face smiles. Now it frowns ever so slightly!"

I smiled suddenly.

"And you want me to explain it?" I asked.

Sharbeau nodded.

"Someone, maybe a prankster, has switched statues on you," I told him. "That's the only explanation there could be."

Sharbeau gave me a clearly disappointed glance. He sighed. "I am sure you, ze great student of ze occult, would 'ave somezing sensible for to explain it." He paused to sigh deeply again. "And you give me stupid answers!"

I got a little impatient. Obviously my friend Sharbeau was a trifle drunk.

"Don't be so damned silly," I told him. "When there's a perfectly logical explanation for something it's stupid to try to pin it on an occult theory."

SHARBEAU seemed suddenly on the verge of tears. He moved over to my chair and gripped my arm with fierce intensity. Perspiration broke out on his brow. His button eyes were pleading.

"But, Clee, it is not anothair statue!" he said with hoarse frenzy. "I am sure it is anothair statue, jus' like you are, until I check everywhere and find that

there is no such stone as what this is made from anywhere in ze United State!"

Sharbeau was a trifle tipsy, but he wasn't in the habbling stage. He was sincere, I could tell. And if he *had* checked, if he *had* found out beyond a shadow of a doubt that this was the only statue of similar stone in the United States—then it seemed highly unlikely that such a prank as I had suggested would have been possible.

"You're dead *certain*?" I demanded.

Sharbeau released his grasp on my arm and stepped back, throwing his arms wide in a melodramatic gesture.

"Regard!" he demanded. "Do I, Paul Jacques Sharbeau, look like ze deceitful man? 'Ave I not alllways been on ze hup-and-hup wiz you?"

I admitted that he was the soul of integrity.

"Then I will tell you more," he said. "Tonight, shortly before I am call you, I find ze statue by ze table in ze study here, on ze floor, in ze completely changed attitudes I 'ave describe!"

"But—" I began.

Sharbeau cut me off, holding up his hand.

"I look on ze mantel, knowing it must be anothair statue put in ze place of my favorite statue which must be stolen! *Voila*—there is no statue on ze mantel. Ze statue on ze floor is ze only one!"

"Still—" I started.

Sharbeau once again cut me off.

"So I am convinced as first you were. I am know ze statue on ze floor is imitation of ze real statue. A prank. And yet," Sharbeau paused dramatically, "when I am pick up ze changed statue, I am see that, but for the vairee strange changes in left limb and right limb and facial expression, it is just like my own."

"Even so—" I started again. I got no further.

"I am remembaire," Sharbeau continued, "a vairee good friend, a delaire in antique art and curios who 'ave once see my statue and tell me it is ze only kind of zat stone in ze United State."

"You made sure the stone in the statue was the same?" I asked.

"But of course," said Sharbeau. "I know ze texture, ze grain of it. Even wiz ze change in limbs and expression, ze texture and grain of ze stone is like allways." He paused. "But rapidly I am calling ze art and curio dealer, am asking him is he certain what he tell me before about ze statue. He says yes."

"No chance, then, of this statue being a clever substitute," I concluded.

"None whatsovaire!" Sharbeau said emphatically. "Now you believe me, no?"

I shook my head grudgingly. "Now I believe you," I admitted. "But, what you have proven is that that statue *somehow moved*, got down from the mantel, and started across the floor. The change in leg position most certainly points to the fact that it moved on its own legs and forgot to assume its former attitude when you walked in on it." Suddenly I stopped. Hand to my head.

Sharbeau looked at me in alarm. "What is ze trouble?"

"My God!" I exclaimed. "I've been talking about that statue as if, as if it were *animated, alive*, and, and—" I faltered.

Little Paul Jacques Sharbeau spread his hands expressively in an elaborate gesture.

"But of course," he exclaimed. "Zat is what I am trying so vairee hard to tell you!"

FOR the rest of the evening we discussed that damned statue until we

were blue in the face and more than a little blotto from the wine. And from Sharbeau I gained every atom of information that I could about its history.

He had picked it up while in Greece. Bought it from a dealer who had claimed it to be centuries old and especially rare. No, there had never been anything strange about it during the ten years in which it had been in Sharbeau's possession. Never until this very night.

For my contribution to the discussion I vocally sorted through all the available information in the back of my mind dealing with the occult as related to statues or images. There was a surprising hodge-podge of stuff I'd gathered and long forgotten, but none of it seemed specifically to fit the purposes. Not a whit about living statues. It was pretty discouraging, especially to Sharbeau, who still had the fixed notion that I was "ze great authority" on anything supernatural.

The best I could do was a promise to barrage the Public Library and several private informational sources I had on such matters the first thing the following morning. Maybe there would be a clue.

Sharbeau, on the other hand, vowed to keep a closer watch on the statue and let me know the instant anything else inexplicable occurred to it.

When I finally rose to leave, I teetered a little drunkenly over to the mantel and stared broodingly at the stone image of the runner. There was something about it, something in the facial expression, which Sharbeau swore had once been smiling, that was defiantly determined.

It made me shudder, and I turned away.

My head was fuzzy, and I figured a cold towel on my face might be a good idea before leaving.

"Where's your bathroom?" I asked Sharbeau.

"Ze vairee first door on ze right," he told me . . .

MORNING found me, in spite of a slight hangover, right on the Library steps the moment the doors were opened. For the affair of the startling statue was the first thing to enter my consciousness on waking.

And even as I ate breakfast and read the paper, my mind strayed constantly from my bacon and eggs and latest headlines, always ending up in a wrestling match with the eerie enigma to which Sharbeau had introduced me the night before.

I telephoned Sharbeau before heading for the Library, and his sleepy voice told me that he'd remained awake the rest of the night just on the chance that the statue might begin to prowl again.

Even though I told him to go to bed and get some sleep, I had a hunch that the little Frenchman would remain on watch before that stone statue until he'd one bottle of wine too many and passed into merciful slumber in spite of himself.

By noon I was finally positive that there would be nothing gained by any further canvassing of the Library. The files there didn't present a source that seemed to give the least hint of what I was looking for. I even took a long-shot chance and poured through a thick, dull tome on ancient Grecian sculpture. Sharbeau's statue was evidently not quite important enough to be listed in it, for it wasn't mentioned.

I couldn't get in touch with two of my private sources, and the other one proved to be utterly unenlightening. It took me the entire afternoon to accomplish exactly nothing.

Gulping a hasty dinner, I walked

down Michigan Boulevard to Sharbeau's place. I had to ring the doorbell at least a dozen times before it was answered. An then a sleep-fogged Sharbeau, clad in the wrinkled remains of the suit he'd been wearing the night before, opened the door.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed in horror, peering out past my shoulder. "It is night-time again, no?"

"It is night-time again, yes," I told him, stepping past him into the apartment.

"I was asleep, on ze floor of ze study," said Sharbeau, confirming what I'd already figured. "Ze wine, it must 'ave hit me shortly before noon. Ze bell ring and waken me."

"What about the statue?" I demanded. "Did it move again?"

Sharbeau blinked, then clapped his hand to his brow. "*Mon Dieu!*—I do not know! I 'ave been asleep!"

He turned and hurried back into the study, and I was right on his heels. The place reeked of wine, and there were no less than eight quart bottles of the stuff, all empty, sitting around. Sharbeau had had quite a watch of it.

He came to an abrupt halt, emitting a gurgling cry, and staring down at the floor in horror.

*Perhaps five feet from the door, in still a different posture from the one of the night before, was the figure of the stone statue!*

"Well," I choked feebly, very feebly, "well!"

"Again it happen!" Sharbeau gasped.

"While you were asleep at the switch," I managed at last, "It went on the prowl again."

I felt a creepy chill along my spine. But I forced myself to bend down and examine this new posture of the stone statue.

The left leg of the statue was thrust forward this time. And just the night

before, with my own eyes, I had seen the right one forward!

And the expression on the features of the image was changed also. Where it had been defiantly, scowlingly, determined the night before—in contrast to its former smile it was now much more markedly grim, much more resolute and fiercely, savagely determined!

Sharbeau had seen all this too.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he moaned softly.

I COULDN'T think of anything to add to that. I stared wordlessly at the stone figure, my brain wheeling madly but none of the cogs meshing any too well.

And then something that might or might not have been significant occurred to me. I put my hand on Sharbeau's arm.

"Listen," I said, "was this, this runner facing in the same direction last night when you discovered him down from the mantel?"

Sharbeau nodded, uncomprehending.

"Toward the door?" I insisted.

"But of course."

"Is he any nearer to the door in this attempt than the first time?" I asked.

Sharbeau thought a moment.

"But of course. It is so. *Vairee* much nearer."

"Then," I declared, "we have at least something to work on. The statue is not just prowling. On each occasion it made for the door. It is trying to get out of here!"

Sharbeau reflected on this. "*Oui*, it seems so. But why?"

He had me there. And even though it was a reasonable question I was nettled.

"I don't know," I snapped. "Anyway, we've got a little more information than we started with."

Sharbeau nodded.

"Look," I said suddenly, "put your

statue back up on the mantel where it belongs and go to bed and get some decent rest. I'll watch the thing until you relieve me. Then I catch a few hours sleep, here. You can wake me up when you're tired and I'll relieve you. That way we'll keep a constant watch. What do you say?"

Sharbeau nodded. "*A voiree* good idea, *Clee*." He picked up the statue and took it back to the fireplace, where he put it atop the mantel. He looked at it haggardly for a moment, sighed troubledly and turned back to me.

"What did you learn from *ze Librai-ree*?" he asked.

I told him the disgusting truth, which seemed to slump his weary shoulders even more than before. I realized, then, that if this thing wasn't cleared up within a damned short time, Monsieur Sharbeau was going to be a psychopathic wreck.

"Think I'll wash up," I told him, as he was shuffling out of his study to get his much-needed shut-eye.

"*Ze* first door on *ze* right," he said automatically . . .

The hours I spent on guard in Sharbeau's study passed slowly, and the ash tray at my side was heaped with cigarette butts when midnight finally rolled around.

I sighed and stretched, suddenly aware that my eyes had been fixed in what amounted almost to a fuzzy sort of hypnosis on the statue atop the mantel.

I sat suddenly erect, straining my eyes into focus on the figure. No. Of course it had been my imagination. It hadn't moved. It was in precisely the same posture as when I'd taken post before it.

Only then was I really aware that Sharbeau's life wasn't the only one that was going to be messed up badly if this thing weren't figured out pretty



damned quickly.

It was driving me quite a little bit batty. And I was finally getting wise to the fact. Cursing myself for ever having gotten involved in the weird mess, I rose, yawning, and went out to rouse Sharbeau and take over his bed.

He woke easily, for he'd had plenty of sleep by now. And after promising not to wake me until nine the next morning, he shuffled back into his study to take up the watch before the stone statue.

I was dead tired, and fell asleep to a whirling half-dream in which I did a stately gavotte on the White House Lawn with a stone statue that always wanted to run away. Sharbeau played the accompaniment for the dance on a bottle of rare wine which had been fashioned into a sweet potato whistle . . .

SOMEONE was rocking the boat quite ungently, and when I opened my eyes I blinked into the visibly excited and tremendously elated face of my little churn Sharbeau.

"I 'ave solved him. I 'ave solved him!" he was shouting. "Ze problem of ze statue is ovaire!"

I sat up, startled.

"Huh?" I gasped. "You mean—"

"I mean it is ovaire, forevaire!" Sharbeau cried, pulling at my arm excitedly.

I bounced out of bed, rubbing my eyes. My watch told me I'd been asleep three hours.

"Come to ze study!" Sharbeau insisted.

I followed him into his book-lined library, looking quickly around to see evidences of a struggle, of a broken statue. I don't know why, but these were the first things that came to mind.

I didn't see either. I just saw the statue, back on the mantel top where

it belonged.

"It moved again," Sharbeau said, grabbing my arm and forcing me into a chair. "It moved again, and I, Sharbeau, am see it move!"

"But I thought—" I began.

But Sharbeau was bound and determined to tell this thing through to the bitter end. He wouldn't allow interruptions.

"It is get down from ze mantle!" Sharbeau said. "Right before my vairee eyes!" He sucked in his breath to emphasize this. "I am watch wiz horror. My throat she is filled wiz ashes. I cannot speak. My 'eart is pound pound pound. *Ze stone statue climbs down from ze mantle like a living thing!*" Sharbeau paused to roll his eyes.

"Go on," I demanded. "Good God, man. Don't stop now!"

"It is on ze floor, now," Sharbeau recounted. "I am still watch in choked horror. *It moves toward ze door, in slow, difficult steps.*"

I closed my eyes, shuddering, getting a mental picture of that small stone creature moving laboriously across the floor while Sharbeau watched on, bug-eyed.

"I cannot stand it," Sharbeau exclaimed. "I am afraid, but I cannot stand ze suspense. I force myself to step toward ze moving statue. Force myself also my soul cries out against it. I am bending down, reaching for ze moving statue, *when it speaks!*"

The words almost knocked me out of my chair.

"Speaks?" I bleated. "Good God, you don't mean s—"

"I mean speaks," said Sharbeau. And suddenly his face was wreathed in a reflectively happy smile. "And I am so glad ze statue speaks, once I am bearing what it has to say."

I was on the edge of the chair.

"What DID it say?" I almost screamed.

Sharbeau cocked his head reflectively, as if making sure he was quoting the precise words of the stone statue. "It say, 'Only once in fifty years am I forced to do zix. I had to speak. I could not be thwarted again.'"

I blinked, repeating the words. "Only once in fifty years was it forced to do this? It had to speak? It couldn't be thwarted again? It said that to you?"

Sharbeau nodded.

"But what was the meaning behind those words, behind the very moving statue itself?" I demanded.

Sharbeau held up his hand. He beamed. "*Vaieee simple, vaieee simple* indeed, *mon ami*. It is a wondaire we do not think of it before. The statue then ask me a question."

"A question?" I bleated.

SHARBEAU nodded. "Oui. It is ask me this question. It is breathe it in my ear." He paused, his face coloring reminiscently. "I am blush wiz embarrassment, and it is all I can do to answer. But I am giving ze satisfactory answer, ze statue completes its mission, and now it is back on ze

mantle like always before."

My glance shot up to the mantle. The statue was there, all right. There and exactly as it had been before any mysterious transformations had started on it. The left leg was thrust forward in the running position, just as it should be.

And the facial expression, just as it should be, was positively beaming with joy and serenity. Gone was the scowling frown.

I turned to Sharbeau.

"But the answer to his question," I demanded, "what was it?"

Sharbeau beamed.

"It was simple, as I say," he told me. "I am answer by saying to ze statue: '*It is ze vaieee first door on the right!*'"

I didn't say anything. I couldn't. I just looked at Sharbeau and up at the mantle where the statue now postured serenely. The very first door to the right, eh? Once in fifty years, eh? I glared at Sharbeau, and the glare slid into a squint of doubt.

Hell, the statue never moved an inch after that. And Monsieur Paul Jacques Sharbeau is an honest man, a person of integrity. And once again he has assumed his utterly blasé disdain for the mysteries of life.

## BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS IN CATS ARE SIMPLE

**D**OES your favorite cat need a blood transfusion after her fight with that damned alley cat down the street? If she does, this should be a simple matter for J. L. Rowland and Glenn McElory of Central College, Fayette, Mo. They say that all cats are universal donors. This does away with the necessity of typing their blood before a transfusion which is the procedure with humans. They even mixed the blood samples from seven different cats and introduced the mixture into the veins of an eighth cat with no ill effects.

In humans, it is essential to type blood into four types. Type IV donors are called the universal donor and can give blood to all four types

of receivers. Types II can give blood to type I and III, type III can give to type I and II, while type I can't give to any other type. All donors can give to their own type. If blood of an alien type is transfused, agglutination will result which is the blood corpuscles of the recipient of the blood sticking together in clumps. This condition is often fatal.

Rowland and McElory also discovered the strange fact that cat blood serum will not cause agglutination of human corpuscles, but that human serum would produce this condition in cat's blood. This fact may have future use if cat's blood can be successfully used for transfusions to humans.

# FANTASTIC FACTS

By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

Maybe you'll find some of these things hard to believe, but they are all fantastically true!

## STRANGE HUNTING RITUAL

**T**HE Iroquois Indians thought animals possessed immortal souls similar to a human being. Therefore, when a member of the tribe would kill an animal, the hunter would beg forgiveness of the animal for having killed him. He would explain to the departing soul that his family needed the skin and flesh of the animal for clothing and food and that if the animal would have been fortunate enough to kill the hunter instead of being killed, the soul of the hunter would not have borne ill feelings toward the animal.

\* \* \*

## BULLS ARE COLOR BLIND

**S**O YOU always thought that your red blouse was the cause of that bull chasing you from his pasture. Well, like so many other popular beliefs this is also full of "bunk."

Bulls are color blind just like all other mammals except man, who is the only mammal possessing color vision. The red cape used during a bull fight might just as well have been made of black, blue, or white cloth for all the difference it would make to the bull. It is the noise and excitement of the bull ring combined with the teasing of the bull fighter that gets on the surly temper of the bull. And once he gets mad, he'll charge at anything and everything regardless of what colored cloth it is made.

\* \* \*

## FISH THAT CLIMB TREES

**I**F you should ever travel to the East Indies and see a fish climbing a tree, don't take the "pledge" because you think that the last drink has made you see things. What you are probably seeing is the climbing perch, which is a native of the East Indies, and often leaves the water to walk along the ground, and climb up low trees.

Why, the New York Aquarium even has some of the fish on exhibit. They are sometimes placed on the floor to amaze visitors who can hardly believe their eyes when the fish walks along the floor with its body upright.

\* \* \*

## A FORTUNE IN THE OCEAN

**D**O YOU want to become a millionaire? All you have to do is discover a way to remove the gold from the ocean. Every cubic mile of ocean water contains approximately

5,000,000 pounds of gold, but present methods of recovering the gold cost about five times as much as the value of the gold recovered.

\* \* \*

## A FORTY-FOOT SKELETON

**O**FFICIALS of the Colorado Museum of Natural History say that the skeleton of the plesosaur they have recently placed on exhibition is the most perfect ever prepared of that species.

The skeleton, discovered about three years ago by a farmer in a cliff of shale of Baca Creek, was unusually intact and complete. Officials estimate the original weight of the huge marine reptile as over three tons. It was described as having a stubby tail and limbs that terminated in flippers about three feet long. The creature made its home in the shallow salt seas that millions of years ago covered the High Plains now found in the west. The skeleton weighs 1400 pounds and is almost forty feet long.

\* \* \*

## LIFE SPAN OF HALIBUT

**W**HETHER said fish don't live long should be introduced to the halibut family. They have been known to live for over 60 years which is about the life span of the average human. The halibut does not even start to reproduce until they are ten years old.

\* \* \*

## A BIRD THAT FLIES UNDER WATER

**A** VERY strange bird, indeed, is the water ouzel. To make sure that no other birds can reach its nest, the water ouzel only lives near the falls of a mountain stream and will only build its nest back of the water beneath the brink of the falls. When the water ouzel leaves or enters its home it flies right through the water.

Stranger than its home is the way the water ouzel gets food, which is only found on the bottom of a stream or brook. The female dives to the bottom of the stream and walks about searching for the insect larvae that live under the stones or move about in the water. If she has to chase an insect, she uses her wings to fly under water just as she does in the air. She definitely flies under water since she does not possess webbed feet which would permit her to swim.

# THE TIRELESS LEG

by P. F. COSTELLO

**There was one thing about this leg—it was ambitious. It had a world of energy!**

THE man lying on the bed in the dingy room was flabby and pale; his bloated cheeks were shadowed with two days' growth of beard; his eyes were a weak watery blue.

A sharp, insistent knock sounded suddenly on the door and the man on the bed raised himself on one elbow. He was wearing cheap, flashy clothes that were now baggy and wrinkled.

"Who is it?" he said.

"You know right enough who it is," an angry feminine voice shouted back. "It's Mrs. MacDougal and I want none of your fine airs, Silas Harker. You can't lay around in my rooms day after day and give me nothing but your mullarkey when it comes time to pay-up. If you don't pay up today, out you go and no mistake."

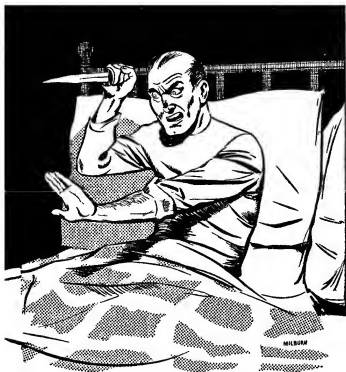
Silas Harker climbed to his feet and slouched across the room, his face set in bitter lines. He opened the door. Mrs. MacDougal was standing in the narrow, dirty hall, arms akimbo. She

was a solid, stout woman with a red face and graying hair.

"I want my rent money," she said bluntly. "You owe me now for three weeks. If you can't pay up, out you go and no mistake. I'm tired of your shilly-shallying. It's hard enough to run an honest—"

"Let's don't go into that," Silas Harker said wearily. He fished into





The knife lifted in a clenched fist;  
the doctor's back was entirely inviting.

his vest pocket and brought forth the carefully preserved stub of a cigarette, lit it and blew a cloud of smoke toward the dirty ceiling. He ran a pale thin hand over his whiskered, sal-low cheeks and regarded his landlady with bitter eyes.

"You'll get your money," he said. "And when I pay you I'll leave this flea-infested fire trap so fast your eyes

will blink. When I say goodbye to this hole and to your fish-wife nagging I'll be the happiest man in the city of Chicago. Don't think I'm staying here because I like it."

"Well," Mrs. MacDougal said, slightly taken aback by the venom in his voice, "that's a fine way to repay my goodness to you. Here I've let you stay in my house, trusting you 'till

you found some work, and now you flare at me like an ungrateful dog. I like your crust, I do."

"Well, thank you for your charity," Harker said with heavy sarcasm. His face tightened and his eyes changed to a wild, angry gleam. "I could buy fifty hovels like this," he snarled, "if it weren't—"

"More of your big talk," Mrs. MacDougal broke in impatiently. "I've heard enough of it and no mistake. If you had a rich father and he did cut you out of the will, like you're always claimin', I can surely understand why. You're nothin' but an ungrateful pup, Silas Harker, and I've had enough of your alibis and airs. Out you go to-night unless you pay-up in full. And no mistake about it."

WITH a final glare Mrs. MacDougal turned and clumped off down the corridor. Silas Harker stared after her bitterly, before re-entering his room and stretching out again on the bed. He reached automatically for the bottle on the night table and poured himself a drink of the cheap whisky it contained.

He drained the glass at a single gulp. The fiery liquor burned his throat, almost gagging him. He lay back on the bed, gasping, feeling the warming effect of the whisky coursing through his body. A spot of color tinged his cheeks and he felt stronger.

"Damn her," he said, "damn her to hell."

There was a dry chuckle from the doorway.

"So," a soft voice said, "you do not approve of our excellent landlady, eh?"

Silas Harker raised himself on an elbow and squinted at the man standing in the doorway of his room. He was a small man, stooped and bent,

with a bald, domed head and bright, piercing eyes. Harker recognized him as one of the tenants of the rooming house, a Dr. Something-or-other, who occupied a room a few doors from his own.

Harker lay back on the bed and reached again for the bottle.

"No I don't," he said. He finished his drink and looked at the Doctor, who was still standing in the doorway, watching him with his hard bright eyes. "But I can't see where it's any of your business," he added.

"You are in a charming mood, to-day," the Doctor said with mild irony. "Do you mind if I come in?"

Silas Harker shrugged.

"Come ahead if you care to. But if you're here to borrow money, save your breath."

The Doctor entered the room and closed the door carefully behind him. He seated himself on the spare chair.

"That is not the purpose of my visit," he said.

"Then what's the angle?" Harker asked, squinting cynically at him. "Don't tell me yours is an errand of mercy, comforting the forlorn and needy, or something like that?"

"Hardly," the Doctor said. "I'm not a philanthropist. My presence here is the result of a very mundane and materialistic idea. There is nothing noble or altruistic in my idea; but there might be a handsome profit in it—for both of us."

Harker looked at him to make sure that he was serious. The Doctor's small pinched face was perfectly grave and his eyes were as sharp as daggers. Harker sat up and swung his feet to the floor.

"Okay," he said, "I'm listening. But I am not in the mood for jokes."

"This is no joke. First, let me introduce myself. I am Doctor Henrich

Zinder. During the last war I was with the Imperial German Army's medical corps. Since then—"

HARKER nodded. "You've been on your uppers." His glance touched the Doctor's frayed clothes briefly. "You look it. Now get to the point. What's this profitable deal you spoke about?"

"You are right," Doctor Henrich Zinder said. "I have been, as you say, on my uppers. But I have not been idle. I have continued to work on my experiments, but the stupid morons of the medical world refuse even to listen to what I have accomplished. And I have accomplished miracles."

"Okay," Harker said, "granting all that, I'm still waiting to hear your proposition. The world is full of crackpots, Doctor, who think they've accomplished miracles; so you're sales talk had better be convincing."

Doctor Zinder smiled faintly.

"I know what you are thinking," he said, "but if you will hear me out I think I can change your opinion of me. First, let me ask you, Mr. Harker, what are your plans for the immediate future?"

"Why?" Harker said surlily. "My plans happen to be my own business. Oh, I guess it doesn't make any difference anyway, though." He lit a cigarette with a nervous hand. "I'm going into the army, I suppose. There's nothing else to do. I'm thirty-five, in fair health, so I'll be inducted in a few months."

Doctor Zinder leaned forward. The light from the window gleamed on his high-domed bald head. His little eyes were sharp and speculative.

"Do you want to go into the army?" he asked. "Do you want to trade your freedom for a miserable pittance each

month? Are you looking forward to wearing coarse woollen uniforms, eating slop, drilling under hot suns until you're ready to collapse? Will it be pleasant to have some illiterate sergeant order you about like a dog?"

Harker sucked slowly on his cigarette.

"That's dangerous talk in these times," he said softly. "Supposing I reported you for what you've just said?"

"I don't think you will," Dr. Zinder smiled. "You see, I know you pretty well. I know how you feel about these things. And you may trust me, Silas Harker."

"Why should I trust you?" Harker said coldly.

"Hear me out. It is true, is it not, that your father was a very wealthy man?"

"Yes," Harker said with savage bitterness, "that's true. My father's estate right now is worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. And I'm forced to live in a hovel like this, hardly knowing where my next miserable meal is coming from. But what's that to you?"

"I feel for you, my boy," Doctor Zinder said gently. "I appreciate what a grave injustice has been done you. So touched was I by your plight that I determined to do something about it. And I think possibly I have hit upon a scheme which might help you to regain what is rightfully yours. That is the profitable idea I have mentioned."

"If you're thinking about breaking my father's will, it's impossible," Harker said. "I've seen the best lawyers in the country about that and none of them has given me the slightest hope. My father disowned and disinherited me for—" He broke off and glared at the Doctor. "Why he disinherited me is none of your business."

"I know why he disinherited you," Doctor Zinder said, smiling. "I mentioned that I knew you rather well. I have gone to considerable trouble to look up your background. It was that little matter of the disappearance of quite a sum of money from his wall safe, wasn't it? That, plus your drinking and gambling and other ungentelemanly habits you picked up here and there."

SILAS Harker ran a hand over his slack jaw. The muscles in his pale face twitched uncontrollably. The strength seemed to flow from his veins. His thin courage melted and he stared nervously at the Doctor.

"You've gone to a lot of trouble to look me up," he said weakly.

"Yes," Doctor Zinder said carefully, "I have. But do not be alarmed, my boy. My investigations were for our mutual benefit. Let me ask you this: Have you ever read your father's will?"

"Yes. The entire estate is willed to an elderly couple who kept house for him. They are having rather a hard time getting along while the will is being probated, but in a few months they come into all of his money and they'll be set for life. A stupid, senile pair of fools, that's what they are."

"That is right," Doctor Zinda said. "And you are left, as you say, out in the cold. However, there is one important clause in the will which is interesting. If," the doctor tapped his finger carefully on his knee, "you are in any way incapacitated and unable to earn a living for yourself, the property reverts to you. You are aware of that?"

"Of course," Harker said irritably. "But there's nothing wrong with me. Just my luck to be good army-bait and nothing else."

"Now we are finally getting around to my little proposition," Doctor Zinder said. "What would be your reaction if I were to tell you that it is possible for me to arrange things so that you will come into your rightful inheritance *and* stay out of the army?"

Harker stared at the Doctor and a slow excitement crept through his thoughts.

"Do you realize what you're saying?" he said hoarsely. "If you could fix things—but no! It's impossible. It can't be done."

"I would not be so sure of that, my boy," Doctor Zinder said. "I say definitely that it can be one, but—" He paused and studied Harker thoughtfully, a faint humorless smile curving his lips.

"But what?" Harker cried. He stood up, towering over the slight figure of the doctor, his fists clenched. "Tell me, damn you," he said excitedly. "I won't be played with like a baby."

"Calmly, my friend," Doctor Zinder said. "Listen to me carefully now. If you were to—ah—lose a leg you would thereby become eligible to benefit under the terms of your father's will. Is that not so?"

Harker sank back on the bed, his eyes widening with horror.

"Yes," he said thickly, "then I would—" His voice faltered and he stared at the doctor's wrinkled face with sudden revulsion. "Is that your plan?" he cried. Panic rose in his breast as the doctor continued to regard him in silence. "Yes, that is your idea! You want to hack me up like a butchered hog, don't you?"

"You are leaping to conclusions," the Doctor murmured. "Part of what you say is true, I admit, but hear me out. In the years since I left Germany I have experimented exclusively with amputation and artificial grafting. The



results I have obtained would rock the medical world were they known. I have perfected a technique of grafting human limbs onto live bodies. Skin grafting is common but I undertook to graft the muscles, bone and nerves together in the same manner. Do you see now what I am getting at?"

HARKER pressed his hands to his temples. His brain seemed to be racing furiously, but he was unable to think coherently.

"No, no," he gasped, "I don't know what you mean and I don't want to know."

"I will be explicit. If you lost a leg in an accident you would become the beneficiary of your father's will, for you would be incapacitated and unable to support yourself. Also you would be deferred from military service. That much you can follow, yes? Good. Now listen carefully. I can give you a new leg. A flesh and blood leg as good or better than the one you will lose. This operation will only take a few months. At the end of that time you will have a perfect leg. No one will know of this. It will be presumed that you have gotten yourself an artificial leg. You will have the complete estate of your father and freedom to do as you please; for the army doctors will have deferred you from service. Do you understand now what I mean?"

"Y—yes," Harker faltered. "I see." He looked guiltily about the room, as if fearful of being overheard. "But how do I know you can get me a new leg? If you fail I'll go through life a cripple, helpless—"

"Even if I did fail," the doctor said, "it would not be too bad. You would have money, life would be pleasant for you."

"No!" Harker cried hoarsely. He

looked down at his legs and shuddered. "I must be sure."

"Do not be alarmed," Doctor Zinder said. "I said 'if' I failed. I will not fail. You do not have to take my word for that. I will let you examine completely the record of my experiments over the past twenty-five years and you will see things that I have done. Have no fear. You will be convinced. Within three months after you lose your leg I will have grafted another one in place for you. And it will be a perfect leg."

"Why are you doing this for me?" Harker said. "What do you want out of this deal for yourself?"

"When you inherit your father's estate you will be a wealthy man. I need money. We will work something out that will be satisfactory to both of us, I think. That is a trifle."

Harker stood up and paced up and down the floor. Tiny beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. He ran a hand through his thinning, sandy hair. His mind ran in circles like a caged rat. Doubts assailed him and his skin grew feverish. Amputation! The word had a horrible sound. A cold, gleaming knife poised to slice—No! He bit his lower lip until the salty taste of the blood was in his mouth.

But his greed was great. The thought of his father's money, tantalizingly close to his grasp, was maddening. All the things he had lusted for in his poverty would be his again, if he took this step. Could he trust this man?

"You want money?" he said jerkily to the doctor.

"That is correct."

Harker's breath became ragged as his suspicion grew.

"Why don't you sell this technique of yours?" he snarled. "That should bring you millions. Damn you, what's

your game?"

"WHO would buy it?" Doctor Zinder said gently. "The government? Hardly. They might take it, use it, but such things are never sold. They become public property when their discovery is announced. It is not so much altruism but the force of public opinion that makes doctors release the rights of their discoveries for the public welfare. Also there is a slight matter of pride. The fools have ridiculed my ideas and theories for two decades. Am I to crawl to them again, begging respectfully that they take my grafting technique as a gift? In that case I would not even receive the credit for the discovery."

"All right, all right," Harker snapped. He paced the floor, thudding his right fist into his left hand. He stopped suddenly in front of the doctor.

"Where will you get the leg?" he demanded.

Doctor Zinder smiled and his face was unpleasantly shadowed.

"That is a mere detail," he murmured. "You may leave that in my hands. Have you made up your mind?"

Harker's breath came in shuddering gasps and his fingers were tightened into straining fists.

"Yes," he said, "I've made up my mind."

## CHAPTER II

FIVE weeks later Silas Harker was wheeled into the luxuriously furnished private office of Counselor Morton Fortescue, senior partner of the law firm of Fortescue and Higgins.

Harker was in a wheel chair. One shod foot was visible against the foot-

rest of the chair. The other was conspicuously missing.

Counselor Fortescue was seated behind a wide mahogany desk. At his side were an elderly, white-haired couple, with bewildered, apprehensive expressions on their tired faces. There was a secretary at the opposite side of the desk with a notebook pad in her hand.

Counselor Fortescue was a heavy-set man with pendulous jowls and snapping brown eyes. He looked up and nodded to Silas Harker.

"It's been some time, Silas, since I've seen you," he said. "Sorry to meet you again under such—er—unhappy circumstances."

Harker smiled wanly but didn't answer. His face was pale and drawn and there were lines about his mouth that had not been there a month before. But his eyes were sharp with a new cunning and sense of power.

"You—er—may come up closer to the desk," Counselor Fortescue said. "It will be easier for us all if we can hear each other clearly."

Harker looked over his shoulder. Doctor Zinder was standing impassively behind the wheel chair.

"Doctor, I do not believe you have met Mr. Fortescue, my father's attorney."

Doctor Zinder bowed and smiled stiffly.

"It is a pleasure, Counselor."

"How do you do?" Fortescue said, as Doctor Zinder moved Harker's chair slowly to the side of the desk. He cleared his throat and glanced down at the papers on his desk. Then he raised his eyes to Silas. "As you know Silas your father's will was not made in your favor. The bulk of the estate, he left to Mr. and Mrs. Mason, who, as you know, were his only servants for the last twenty five years of his life. You,

I am sure, remember the Masons favorably." He smiled reassuringly at the white-haired couple at his side.

Harker looked up at the two old people, who stood, hands clasped together, watching the scene with troubled eyes.

"I remember the Masons," he said. He nodded to them and turned his gaze again to the lawyer. "Please go on."

"However," Counselor Fortescue said, "there was a provision in your father's will stipulating that you would become the beneficiary if you should in any way be disabled or incapacitated." His gaze wavered from Harker's and dropped to the one shoe visible against the foot rail of the wheel chair. He coughed and mopped his brow with a handkerchief. "Since your unfortunate accident you have become, under the terms of the will, your father's sole beneficiary. However there are a few things remaining to be cleared up."

"WHAT things?" Harker asked quickly.

"First, I must have a complete report of how the accident occurred, to add to the account we already have. It is a formality, but unfortunately a necessary one. Dr. Zinder, I believe, was the surgeon who performed the operation?"

"Yes," said Harker.

"That is excellent," the lawyer said. He leaned back in his chair. "Suppose you tell us, Doctor, the circumstances surrounding the operation. My secretary will take complete notes and we will have this business over with."

"You have made several references to accident," Doctor Zinder said quietly. "It was not an accident, but a gangrenous infection that necessitated the operation. Mr. Harker has rooms in the establishment where I reside. A simple scratch on his leg resulted in the infection. When he asked me to ex-

amine him it was too late for anything but emergency measures. I performed the operation in my room. I am a licensed surgeon and I have the necessary equipment in my rooms. That is all there is to the matter. It is extremely unfortunate for Mr. Harker that he did not have his cut taken care of immediately, but there is nothing that can be done about that now."

"I see," Fortescue said. He tapped a pencil against the sheets of paper on his desk and frowned. "In that case there is no need to take up any more of your time. I will have the necessary papers drawn up. A few signatures will be necessary and then your father's estate will be in your hands."

"Thank you," Harker said.

"There is just one more thing," Fortescue said. He smiled at the elderly couple beside him. "Mr. and Mrs. Mason served your father long and faithfully and it was obviously his wish that they be taken care of. This change in the will has left them in extremely difficult straits. Now, just as a suggestion, I think it might be a nice gesture if you were to give them something in the way of a pension to take care of their simple wants. A thousand or two a year would do it nicely and—er—you can see it won't be for many years."

Harker looked thoughtfully at the Masons and then at Morton Fortescue.

"Would they have done it for me?" he inquired mildly.

"Why, my boy," Fortescue said in surprise, "I thought you knew. They had made arrangements to provide you with a yearly income for life out of the estate. They felt distressed that you had been left out completely, and they felt your father wouldn't mind too much. I had all the papers drawn, but of course your unfortunate accident has changed everything."

"So they were going to do that for

me," Harker said softly.

"Certainly," Fortescue said heartily. "They're wonderful people. It's little wonder that your father thought so much of them. Now I'd suggest as a pension—"

"Mr. Fortescue," Harker said icily, "in the future I can dispense with your advice and suggestions. The Masons were stupid fools if they thought one damn about me. Because they were going to make an addle-headed, sentimental gesture, does it follow that I have to be equally foolish? Certainly not."

Morton Fortescue dropped his eyes to the desk and a flush stained his heavy face.

"I see," he said. "I will send over the papers for your signature by messenger. Good day."

Harker smiled thinly.

"Goodbye, Counselor," he said lightly.

He was still smiling in comfortable satisfaction as Doctor Zinder turned his chair and wheeled him out of the office.

### CHAPTER III

"WHERE'S my leg?"

Silas Harker shouted the question at Doctor Zinder. He was seated in his wheel chair in a sumptuously furnished hotel suite and the doctor was regarding him blandly from the comfortable depths of an over-stuffed chair.

Harker's hands were hooked like claws about the arms of his chair and his face was flushed with rage.

"You heard me!" he bellowed. "Don't sit there and grin at me, damn you! Where is the leg you promised me? It's been five months now since my operation. You've got all the money you need, haven't you?"

"Yes, now that you mention it, I

have plenty of money," the doctor said calmly. He blew a lazy wreath of smoke toward the ceiling. "These things cannot be rushed, my boy. Securing just the exact type of leg I need for the operation is taking a little longer than I thought. You see it must be the leg of a man close to your own age and size. I have a prospect lined up for tonight and maybe luck will be with me this time."

"You still haven't told me how you're going to get the leg," Harker said. "Are you going to buy it? Who'd be foolish enough to sell a leg?"

"You were," Doctor Zinder chuckled. "Shut up!" shouted Harker. "I did it only because I trusted you. I don't want any more of your damn attempts at comedy, Zinder."

He pulled the blanket closer about his lap and wheeled his chair sulkily away from the doctor. His gaze moved disconsolately over the rich furnishings of the room. They suddenly seemed a heavy, outrageous price to pay for his miserable helplessness.

Doctor Zinder stood and walked to the door.

"*An revoir*, my impetuous friend." He glanced at his watch. "I meet our new prospect in less than an hour. Perhaps when I return I shall have good news to report."

When the doctor had gone Harker wheeled his chair to the wide double windows that commanded a view of the tossing gray lake and his eyes grew cold as he watched the white sails far out on the water and the swooping gulls playing tag with foamy-crested breakers that dashed against the shore.

Everything he gazed on seemed joyous and carefree and unfettered. His eyes dropped to his lap and a choking anger swept over him.

If Zinder had been lying to him . . .

The thought was too much. Zinder

*couldn't* have fabricated all the records and photographs of experiments over the last two decades.

IT was then, as he sat before the window watching the gray lake, that he decided Zinder must die. He wondered why the thought had never occurred to him before. Whether Zinder had lied to him or not, whether he accomplished the grafting of the new leg or not, was immaterial. The man knew too much and for that reason he would always be dangerous.

The thought of Zinder's death gave him a measure of comfort. Harker was slightly surprised at the extent of his own callousness in this respect. He turned over in his mind a half dozen methods he could use to eliminate the doctor and he was pleased to discover that the process was a pleasant and stimulating pastime.

Once the decision to kill Zinder was made, he felt strangely relieved. He realized then that in all probability he had been subconsciously planning the man's murder for months. It was all so logical and simple that it startled him. Zinder was the only man who could ever cause him trouble. No one in the world suspected that the amputation of his leg had been deliberate, and no one could possibly dream that he was planning to have a flesh and blood leg grafted onto his stump. Zinder, however, knew those things, and he was probably intending to blackmail him for the rest of his life when the operation was completed.

Harker chuckled out loud and the first smile in months touched his lips. What an unpleasant surprise was in store for the little German doctor!

For the rest of the afternoon he concentrated on ways and means. A gun would be simple and definite but the noise would create attention. The op-

portunities for poison were somewhat limited. That left the alternative of cold steel.

A knife would be perfect, Harker decided. He could easily conceal it in the folds of his blanket and when Zinder turned his back—that would be that.

There would then be the problem of disposing of the body, but he could figure out something without too much difficulty.

When Zinder returned to the hotel apartment it was dark. He closed the door hurriedly behind him and strode across the room to Harker. His face was flushed and his hands trembled as he lit a cigarette.

"Well, what luck?" Harker asked anxiously.

"I have the leg," Zinder said. His eyes were flicking nervously about the room as he spoke.

Harker felt a thrill of excitement. He leaned forward in his chair, eyes blazing.

"You've got it?" he cried.

"Yes," said Zinder.

"Wonderful! How soon can we start the operation?"

"Immediately. I've already sent for the car to take you to the laboratory. There is not a second's time to lose. I must perform the operation before rigor mortis sets into the leg."

"Rigor mortis!" Harker cried. "Then the leg has just been freshly amputated. Zinder, where is this leg? Where did you get it?"

"I've sent the leg on to the laboratory," Zinder said. "Now stop hithering me with questions. You've got to get ready."

"ZINDER!" Harker cried desperately, "where did you get that leg? Whose was it? Where is that person now? I must know. You can't possibly understand how I feel."

"You're behaving like a child," Zinder snapped. "What difference does it make where I got the leg? It will be yours within twenty-four hours, you fool."

"That's why I must know," Harker said.

"I will tell you this much," Zinder said. "The former owner of the leg has no use for it now."

Harker relaxed slowly in his chair.

"I feel better," he said. "You got the leg then from the morgue, didn't you?"

Doctor Zinder paused in the act of lighting a cigarette and studied Harker deliberately.

"You are being rather naive, my friend," he murmured. "I had to take drastic measures to secure this particular leg. To be blunt, I had to murder the man."

"Murder?" gasped Harker. "But —"

"Don't act so shocked," Doctor Zinder said coldly. "You don't imagine I wanted to kill the fool, do you? It was the only thing I could do. I met him at a lonely spot far from the city. Everything was perfect except that his fondness for his leg was greater than the inducement of your cash. So I had to put him out of the way. Now stop babbling. The thing has been done. And if we're going to perform a successful operation we must hurry."

"But it seems so horrible," Harker said in a stunned voice. He couldn't account for the feeling of revulsion that gripped him. Not an hour before he had been pleasantly plotting Zinder's death without the tiniest qualm of conscience. But this, somehow, seemed different. He passed a shaking hand over his forehead.

"All right," he said, "I will get ready."

His voice was heavy and dull and

his arms seemed tired and old as he wheeled his chair toward the bedroom.

#### CHAPTER IV

TWENTY-FOUR hours later Silas Harker lay on an operation table in Doctor Zinder's laboratory. A white sheet was draped over his body. His breathing was heavy and labored. Occasionally he twisted on the table and a feeble moan passed his lips.

Doctor Zinder worked swiftly and silently over him. For an hour there was no sound in the small room but the dry scraping sound of the scalpel and Harker's rhythmic breathing. Finally Doctor Zinder laid aside his instruments and slipped his arms from the surgical dressing gown he was wearing.

An almost fanatical light of triumph was in his eyes as he studied the results of his work. He checked Harker's pulse and then snapped out the gleaming battery of overhead lights.

When Harker awoke he stared without comprehension at the ceiling of the room. He felt sick and weak. Finally he realized that he was back at the hotel, in his own bedroom. Consciousness left him then, but he came to again in a few hours. He was able to raise his head from the pillow and glance down at his form, outlined under the thin bed covering. A quick exultation swept over him as he saw the outlines of two legs stretching toward the foot of the bed.

*Zinder had done it!*

That was his first deliriously happy thought. His new leg was bandaged tightly from hip to ankle and there was no sensation or feeling to it at all. It might have been a heavy bar of lead attached to his body—but Harker knew it wasn't.

The bedroom door opened and Doctor Zinder appeared.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"Fine," Harker said, "fine. H—how did things go?"

"Excellent. I have every reason to believe that the operation was a complete success. Within a few weeks you should be up and walking. Do you feel anything in your recently acquired member?"

"Nothing," Harker said.

"That is to be expected."

"I haven't tried to move it," Harker said. "Would it hurt to try?"

"No, but you will not be able to move the muscles until the cast is removed. That will not be for a few days. Until then, just rest."

A week later Zinder removed the cast from the new leg and Harker was able to sit up for the first time since the operation.

"You will not be able to walk for some time," Zinder said. "It will take you a while to become accustomed to the leg. Have you tried to move the muscles yet?"

"No," Harker said, "I—I've been afraid."

"Nonsense, there is nothing to fear. The muscles and nerves should have mended by this time. It will not hurt to use them a little each day. In fact you must exercise this new leg to strengthen it. Try now."

HARKER leaned back in the chair and closed his eyes. His new leg was stretched straight before him on a cushioned stool. Except for the ugly red incisions above the knee it was as perfect as his own leg. In fact, it was a good deal larger and more muscular than the leg with which Nature had endowed him.

"Try!" Doctor Zinder said. His voice cracked with authority. "You must!"

"I'm trying," Harker gasped.

Sweat stood out on his brow and ran in tiny rivulets down his cheeks. His fingers gripped the arms of the chair until his knuckles whitened. Slowly, painfully, he flexed the new leg until the knee was lifted slightly from the stool.

"There!" Doctor Zinder cried triumphantly. "You have done it."

Harker relaxed, breathing heavily. The leg sank back to its cushioned support.

"I did it," Harker said tremulously. "You saw it, Doctor. I really moved it, didn't I?"

"Of course," Doctor Zinder said. "And you must continue to use it until it is as strong as your other leg."

For two weeks Harker exercised his new leg religiously, until he felt that it was as strong and dependable as his own leg. He had not yet tried to walk on his new leg but that day, he knew, was not far away.

And when that day arrived he would have no further use for the good Doctor Zinder. The thought of the doctor's death was a tonic to him during his days of convalescence.

Finally the day came when he walked. At first he took a few cautious steps about the room, then, growing bolder, he advanced cautiously into the living room and from there to the kitchen and eventually back to his bedroom.

He sank into his chair, breathing hard, but tremendously excited and happy. He had walked! That was all he had been waiting for. When his strength returned he walked to the kitchen and rummaged through the drawers until he found what he wanted—a slim, razor-sharp carving knife.

When Doctor Zinder returned he was sitting in his wheel chair, swaddled in blankets.

"Well," the doctor said, striding to-

ward him, "how did it go today?"

"Not so well," Harker said weakly. "Something gave way while I was taking my exercises. The knee has been hurting like the devil ever since."

"Hmmm," the doctor said, "we'll have to see about that."

He bent down beside Harker's chair and turned back the blanket.

"It looks all right," he said quietly, "but I'll make a complete examination."

Harker smiled.

"I think that would be best," he said.

His hand closed tenderly over the hilt of the knife.

"By the way, Doctor," he said, "do you remember how you got this leg for me? You killed a man for it, didn't you?"

"That is a subject which is closed," Doctor Zinder said shortly.

"I've often wondered how you did it," Harker said musingly. His eyes were measuring the exact spot on the doctor's thin neck where he would plunge the knife. He derived an ironic satisfaction from talking about the man the doctor had murdered, while preparing to end the doctor's own life. It was the perfect touch. His smile widened.

"Did you use a knife?" he asked.

"No. I stunned the man with a blow from behind."

"Then," Harker said softly, "you borrowed his leg."

"Yes."

"But the body?"

"It was a deserted section of the city. No remains will ever be found." The doctor went on talking but Harker was not listening. He was not interested in what the doctor had done with the body. The time had come to strike.

"Does it still hurt?" Doctor Zinder asked.

"Very much," Harker said.

Frowning, the doctor bent over the leg and his back was to Harker. Unhurriedly Harker drew the knife from the folds of the blanket and plunged it through the back of the doctor's neck.

It was all over very quickly. The doctor lurched forward, a strangling, gurgling cry bursting from his throat. As he struck the floor he rolled over and for an instant Harker stared into the dying man's hate-filled, impotently blazing eyes—and then the spark in those eyes went out forever.

There was quite a lot of blood and it took Harker several hours to clean up the mess. But when he finished he congratulated himself. The doctor's body was in an asbestos lined trunk which was securely locked and bolted. The express company would pick the trunk up that afternoon and cart it to a river warehouse. Harker had made these arrangements in advance. The blood-stains had been removed from the carpeting and floor, the butcher knife was back in the kitchen drawer where it belonged.

Everything was perfect. It took him only a few moments to pack his bags and then he left the hotel. He did not intend to return. He was leaving the city that night. As he rode down in the elevator he felt magnificent. True he was a little weak from his exertions, but his new leg was strong and buoyant beneath him and he felt fine.

And Zinder was out of the way forever. That was another reason for his ebullient feelings. He was safe now from exposure. His life was his own, to live as he deemed.

Whistling, he strode through the lobby of the hotel and into the bright sunlight of Michigan Boulevard. He hailed a cab and directed the driver to take him to a downtown hotel. As long as he had the entire afternoon to kill



he decided to get a little rest. With a contented sigh he leaned back and lighted a cigarette. His eye chanced to fall on an army recruiting poster as he was driven along and he smiled cynically.

"Suckers," he thought.

## CHAPTER V

HE was tired when he got to his hotel room. His breath was short and he was perspiring freely. The new leg was the only part of his body that seemed fresh and strong. The muscles of his own leg were trembling with weariness. He sank gratefully onto the soft bed and stretched out, closing his eyes.

For several minutes he lay there, resting comfortably and musing on the delights of the existence that he would be soon enjoying. And then he noticed that his new leg was twitching strangely. He sat up, perplexed, and as he did, the leg swung off the bed and pulled him up to a standing position.

He stood beside the bed frowning bewilderedly. One instant he had been comfortably lying down, with no immediate intention of getting up; but now, here he was, on his feet. Perhaps he had imagined the entire thing. Maybe he only *imagined* that the leg, for an instant, had acted independently of his will.

The thought that it might *not* have been just imagination; had, in fact, actually happened, brought a chill sweat to his forehead.

For several seconds he pondered the happening uneasily, and he had just decided that it was an accidental reflex when the leg moved again, in a long step toward the door. Harker's own leg moved automatically to keep him from his losing his balance and the other leg continued walking. Pow-

erless to stop, Harker found himself striding across the room to the door.

He would have crashed into the solid wood of the door if he hadn't, at the last instant, jerked it open. He was in the hallway then, striding helplessly toward the emergency stairway that led to the street.

He was so confused and bewildered that he was unable to think coherently. The leg started determinedly down the steps and Harker could do nothing but follow. When he reached the street the leg turned sharply and headed for the downtown district with long swinging strides.

Harker fought down the panic mounting in his breast. Obviously there was some rational explanation for the leg's conduct. Maybe the nerves and muscles of the leg were not as yet coordinated to his thinking processes and were acting with independent, automatic reflexes, like the twitching halves of a severed snake.

There was little comfort in this rationalization. The long strides of the leg forced his own leg to unaccustomed exertion to keep him from falling to the ground with each step. His breath was coming hard and he was perspiring freely after six or seven blocks, but still the leg gave no indication of slowing or stopping. When they reached the downtown area the leg apparently lost its determined purposefulness for it led Harker on an aimless, wandering tour of the Loop that lasted until darkness had come and lights were winking on from windows of the office buildings.

HARKER was becoming dizzy with fatigue. His body ached and his mouth was parched and dry. Each breath was an effort that became increasingly hard to make. Hunger and thirst were gnawing at him but he was powerless to stop, even for a quick

swallow of water. The leg was tireless. It marched along block after block, crossing streets, turning down alleys, retracing its pathway aimlessly and endlessly.

Finally, as the evening was wearing on toward midnight, the leg left the Loop and headed southward. Now there seemed to be a new purpose and direction in its movements and its strides grew longer, more determined.

Harker's breath sounded like the rasping of dry paper; his body trembled with weariness, but he stumbled on helplessly. He tried to throw himself to the ground to gain a moment's respite but the leg held him to its course with frightening strength.

Hysteria was plucking at him now, torturing his thoughts with a thousand mad possibilities. He didn't dare ask himself the questions that hammered at his brain.

The Loop was now far behind. Harker's hysterically gleaming eyes saw that he was passing through the city's industrial district. The streets were deserted and the occasional lights cast a ghostly illumination against the crude, squat factory buildings.

The leg's determined strides slackened noticeably as it turned and started up a dark side street. Halfway down the darkened street it stopped.

A sobbing cry of relief broke from Harker's parched lips. This hellish business had finally come to an end. He leaned against the wall of a building until his giddy weakness passed and some of his strength returned.

But when he tried to move he found it impossible. The leg was firmly attached to the ground as if it had been rooted there. Harker made a dozen attempts to walk away but they were hopelessly futile. Sobbing, he sank back against the wall of the building. His wild staring eyes tried to pierce

the gloomy darkness of the side street. There was no one in sight. The street was deserted.

Fear swept over him in shuddering shocks. What would happen to him? Was he doomed to remain rooted here until he died of thirst? He groaned and dropped his head into his hands. What madness had prompted him to enter into this terrible, inhuman situation? He cursed Doctor Zinder until he was weak and spent.

**S**UDDENLY he heard a footstep on the sidewalk. He jerked his head up and saw a bulky dark form moving slowly toward him. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth and a shuddering hysteria swept over him.

The approaching figure stopped.

"All right, buddy," a voice from the darkness said. "What's the idea? This ain't a public park. Get moving?"

Harker almost fainted with relief as he recognized the tone of authority and saw, as the man stepped closer, the uniform and badge he was wearing.

A light flashed in the darkness and a stab of illumination leaped into Harker's face. He blinked in the glare.

"What's the matter with you?" the officer demanded. "I ought to run you in for loitering here. This is a defense area, you know."

Fear was again hammering at Harker. In the terror of his immediate predicament he had forgotten that he had the blood of Doctor Zinder on his hands. And the man holding the light in his face was an officer of the law, the law which Harker had brazenly flouted. He couldn't afford to be arrested now.

"I—I just stopped to rest a minute," he said weakly. "I'm sorry."

"Well, get movin' then."

Sweat poured out of Harker's pores as he tried frantically to walk away

from the spot. But the leg was as firmly attached to the sidewalk as a stone post.

"What's the matter with you?" the officer demanded suspiciously. "I told you to get movin' didn't I? What are you waiting for? A little help from my club?"

"N—no," gasped Harker, "it's just —"

Suddenly the leg came to life again. With a single stride it turned Harker around and started back toward the cross-street. Now it moved more rapidly, more determinedly than ever.

And Harker realized then that the leg had been looking for something. And now it seemed to have found the trail for which it had been seeking; for its strides were sure and steady.

His heart trembled with this realization. A sobbing cry choked in his throat and his eyes were wild and mad with horror.

*What was the leg searching for?*

He didn't dare answer this question; his mind recoiled from it in sharp terror.

The leg strode with inevitable sureness and strength through the darkened factory district and headed west toward the deserted waste areas of Chicago's sprawling southwest side. Saliva drooled from Harker's slack lips. His face was stiff with blind, unreasoning fear.

FOR an hour the leg carried him straight west until it reached a vast deserted lot, used by the city as a refuse heap. There it swung sharply and entered the lot, striding heedlessly, blindly, over the heaps of rusted cans, bottles and filth dumped in squat ugly piles over the face of the lot.

Ahead in the darkness Harker could see the bulky outlines of a crumbling wall, sagging with the weight of its

years. The leg was carrying him toward the lowest section of the wall, which was hardly two feet high. Harker sank to his ankles in the slime and ooze of the refuse and he staggered blindly with weariness.

Babbling, hysterical words poured from his lips and the sound of the sobbing voice was a weird cacophony that roared inside his head like maniacal thunder.

Something was plucking at his mind. A blind, frantic thought was hammering through the maze of panic that clouded his brain. It was something that had been said to him, but he couldn't remember what it was or who had said it.

HIS wild eyes swung over the deserted lot with its piles of dirt and refuse and then to the broken, crumbling wall that loomed closer with each of the leg's powerful, determined strides.

The wall enclosed a pit. And in that pit something gleamed whitely.

A sobbing scream tore from Harker's throat.

He knew of this place. Doctor Zinder had told him of this place. And that was the thought that had been flickering on the border of his consciousness.

*Doctor Zinder had told of this place!*

This was the spot where Doctor Zinder had committed murder and stolen a leg. The leg which was now drawing him irresistibly toward the gleaming whiteness at the bottom of the pit.

Doctor Zinder had told him this, but he had been preparing to kill him at the time and the words had hardly registered.

Doctor Zinder had said: "*No remains will ever be found!*"

Harker screamed madly as the leg stepped up to the crumbling wall. With every atom of his strength he fought

against the leg, but his frantic efforts were unavailing.

Doctor Zinder's words pounded like a gong in his head.

*"No remains will ever be found!"*

The stench of fumes from the lime pit were in Harker's nostrils as the leg broke into a stumbling run that covered the last few feet in a faltering rush.

Harker screamed, and the sound was

a horrible choking noise in his throat. He screamed again as the leg took the last final step and that scream was broken off in a ragged gurgling shriek as his plummeting body struck the cloying waves of corrosive lime. . . .

And in that last horrible instant Harker knew what the leg had been searching for.

THE END

## The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR  
(Continued from page 7)

TOM WHITE recently visited our offices while we were making up the magazine. Tom, to introduce him, is Mr. Average Reader. In short, he's one of our fans. We're glad to meet you readers personally once in a while. It gives us a chance to get some personal touches and comments on our work.

ONE of the things Tom pointed out was the fact that if we were going to run reprints, we ought to go back further into our files, and give you some of the really old ones, ten to fifteen years ago. So that is why our newly instituted policy of reprinting old classics has been dropped from this issue, and from the next. We're digging back into ancient history in an attempt to find some that are super, and the job is a tremendous one.

IN that respect, we'd like you readers to help us out. Next time you write, give us a few suggestions on what you'd like to see—you old readers who read our companion magazine, *Amazing Stories* as far back as 1926 to 1930. If there are any you think you'd like to read again, let us know. It'll help our decision.

YOUR editors have a few things in mind that did not appear in our own magazines—which we are looking into. Book-length classics of fantasy that will certainly be new to you. We may have an announcement of a real treat in this respect in a month or two.

AUGUST DERLETH, whose fantasy stories you've all enjoyed, recently went into the publishing business himself on a little book featuring the stories of his very good friend, Clark Ashton Smith. You all remember him. A master of the weird-fantasy for many long years. This new book, which we've just scanned, is titled "Out Of Space And Time," and speaking of re-

prints, you ought to get a copy. It's well worth it, and we all thank Mr. Derleth for giving us this opportunity to have these works in a form we can preserve for those cold, wet nights when a good fantasy makes the bed seem a more comfortable and homey place.

THE beautiful Bird of Paradise of New Guinea really knows how to win a mate. The male first clears a large circular piece of ground for his courting space. With loud calls, he notifies the prospective female to come and see what a "catch" he is.

When the female arrives, he struts about and exhibits his brilliant display of colorful plumage. This is the "clinger" and the female is won. Then, just to show her who is boss, the male often proceeds to peck the female in a none-too-gentle manner.

Although each male Bird of Paradise hands out the same old line, it never fails to win the girl.

STRANGE as it may sound, a full grown adult only possesses 300 bones while as a baby he possessed 270 bones. This seemingly impossible phenomenon is caused by the fact that as a person matures some of his bones join to form one bone.

SCIENTISTS, ever on the search for ways of effectively combating disease in humans and domestic animals always need animals who are susceptible to the disease so that their reactions to various attempted cures may be studied before they are tried on humans.

The greatest aid in the laboratory is the guinea pig, but there are some diseases to which the guinea pig is not susceptible. Scientists think they have a solution to this problem in the form of the hamster, a tailless rodent about four inches long, who comes all the way from China. The hamsters are golden brown in color with darker markings just below the ears.

ACCORDING to Dr. Edmund V. Cowdry of Washington University's School of Medicine, who brought in a colony of twelve hamsters over two years ago, to help in the study of John's disease of cattle, which resembles tuber-

culosis in humans, the hamster may be susceptible to infantile paralysis. If this is true, it will be of great value to researchers. The only animal now available that is susceptible to infantile paralysis is the monkey and they are so costly and troublesome that they are not so good for research on the subject. It is hoped that the hamster can effectively replace the monkey in the study of infantile paralysis.

**T**HE burial custom in the 10th century A.D., of the Estonians, a race of people that lived between the Vistula River and the Baltic Sea, was indeed a strange one.

By some unknown means, the Estonians were able to freeze the body of the dead man and keep it in the man's home for many months in perfect condition. The friends and relatives of the deceased would then gather for a huge funeral feast that would last for months—the wealthier the deceased, the longer the feast lasted. A wealthy Estonian or a member of the nobility would be honored with a funeral that would last about six months. In between the feasting and drinking the people would play games and be merry while the frozen body lay in state, awaiting burial.

**T**HE method of distributing the remaining assets of the deceased after the funeral expenses were paid was also unique. All the remaining possessions were divided into five or more piles of unequal value. The piles were then placed about a mile from the town with the pile of least value closest to and the most valuable pile farthest from the town. The men of the town would then mount their swiftest horses and race for the piles and each man could claim the pile he reached first.

The body was then cremated and buried and the funeral came to an end.

**Y**OU all know salt as being indispensable to the human race and animals alike, but have you ever realized how inconsistent and strange it really is.

When you combine the two elements, sodium, a metal that burns under water, and chlorine, a very deadly gas, in the proper proportions, you produce salt which is neither poisonous nor will it burn under water. When you mix hydrochloric acid, one of the strongest of all acids, with caustic soda, a powerful corrosive, in correct proportions, you produce a solution of salt and water that is entirely harmless.

**R**OCK salt is practically as hard as the hardest coal, yet it is easily dissolved in water. People use it to melt the ice off their sidewalks in winter, and use it in summer in ice-cream freezers to help freeze the cream. It is used to preserve certain foods, but can also be used to kill pesty plants. Products made from it are used in the bleaching of cloth as well as for tanning leather. Yet for all of its many uses, salt is one of the

cheapest substances to buy.

**A**CCORDING to the National Park Service, the raccoons have devised about the most ideal home life of all animals. The male raccoon shares with his mate the responsibility of rearing and training the baby raccoons. Perhaps papa raccoon wants to make sure that junior grows up to be a "chip" off the old block.

**A** SOLDIER doesn't mind fighting in the rain, fighting in a hot sun, or fighting in a deep snow, but one thing he has never been able to get used to is being infested with lice.

It seems that from time immemorial, lice have been plaguing soldiers, especially at the front lines where bathing facilities are more limited.

It is with great interest, therefore, that military men have watched the developments in the experiments of A. Sant-Gyorgyi, of Budapest, Hungary. His experiments consisted of feeding large amounts of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> to rats badly infested with lice. Almost immediately after feeding, the lice left the rats.

If Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> can produce the same results with humans, it will be a blessing to soldiers of every nation.

**H**ARRY J. RUBIN, of Cleveland, Ohio, has invented a new powder that can cool water far below its freezing point within a few minutes without causing the water to freeze.

In tests, a few ounces of the powder dissolved in a glass of water dropped the temperature almost 40 degrees in three minutes. Other tests have been made where the temperature of the water dropped to 23 degrees below zero without freezing. The reason the liquid does not freeze is that the powder dissolved in the water produces a solution whose freezing point is much below 32° F, which is the normal freezing temperature of water.

**T**HE chilled water has many possible uses, especially in the field of medicine. It can be used to fill ice bags, preserve serum, or to cool X-ray photographic solutions, since the chilled water will remain cool for several hours. Moreover, the cost of the chemical is very low, about one cent a pound, and yet each pound equals four pounds of ice in cooling power.

**A**CCORDING to C. G. Taylor of the Taylorcraft Aviation Corporation, a poorly trained pilot is only one-fourth as safe in his airplane as in his automobile; but with proper training he is four times as safe in his plane as in his car.

**S**UDDENLY we discover we are out of breath. And also out of space. And now you can get out of reading any more of this stuff. But we'll be back next month! Heh heh! Meanwhile, let's keep slapping the Jap! Rap.

# SHAYLA'S GARDEN

by DWIGHT V. SWAIN

**Shayla had suitors, but apparently their interest lagged, for they never stayed long.**

**H**AND in hand, as lovers will, they came strolling down the narrow, shadowy *Vieux Carre* street.

Still I strained my eyes, struggling to penetrate the gloom. Trying to reassure myself that the purple velvet of the New Orleans twilight had not deceived me.

The man was young, dark, hand-

some. Him, I did not know.

But the girl was Shayla!

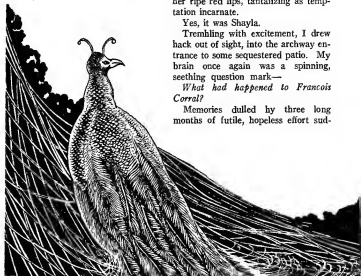
Even in the thick dusk, there could be no more doubt of that. No mistaking the slim perfection of her youthful body; the lilting, seductive grace of her walk; the ethereal loveliness of her oval face, framed in the rippling waves of soft golden hair that hung to her shoulders; the strange witchery of her slow, unfathomable eyes and her ripe red lips, tantalizing as temptation incarnate.

Yes, it was Shayla.

Trembling with excitement, I drew back out of sight, into the archway entrance to some sequestered patio. My brain once again was a spinning, seething question mark—

*What had happened to Francois Corral?*

Memories dulled by three long months of futile, hopeless effort sud-





There were many lovely plumed birds in Shayla's garden

denly surged to the fore again, sharp and vivid as the girl's own lovely features had been that other, half-forgotten day, when I stood at our apartment window close by Jackson Square, studying her through Francois's binoculars as she sauntered along the park's curving paths.

"Is she not exquisite?" he'd rhapsodized. "Such beauty! Such charm—"

I nodded. Yet even then, some inner voice had made me wary, slow to commit myself completely.

"You know that little curio shop over behind the cathedral?" he went on. "The one on that little side street, about three blocks off the Square?"

"Yes."

"Shayla lives there. Her aunt, Madame Bercamier, owns the place. The old lady is very strict, though. She won't let Shayla receive callers, so I can see her only when she walks in the Square each afternoon."

"I'd say that was better than having to court her under the nose of some old harridan whose ideas of romance are dated 1870," I retorted.

"Yes, you're right," Francois agreed. Idly, he "doodled" a whole series of "F's" on the back of an envelope, a favorite trick of his. And then, continuing gaily: "But today, the madame is away visiting. Shayla is taking me home with her. She wants me to see her patio garden; she says it is very lovely. The whole afternoon we shall have alone together there!"

I couldn't hold back a smile. Francois was American, yes. But his ancestry revealed itself in his enthusiasm over this flirtation—he was every inch the French gallant, too.

Through the binoculars, I watched him as he hurried down the street to the park and Shayla. Saw him greet her. Followed them with the glasses as they

left the Square and moved off toward the little store that was her home.

He never came back.

BY THE next noon I was frankly worried. I went to the curio shop myself, and asked to see Shayla.

Old Madame Bercamier threw me the kind of look ordinarily reserved for hopeless mental cases.

"My niece?" she snapped querulously. "What are you talking about, young man? I haven't any niece. I've lived here alone all of ten years, ever since *Le Bon Dieu* took away my poor husband, rest his soul." She crossed herself. Then, glaring again: "Now be off with you, before I call a *gendarme*!"

Two more days passed. I was sick with anxiety. At last I notified the police.

The lieutenant to whom I eventually was referred assigned two plainclothesmen to the case. They went with me again to Madame Bercamier's shop. Politely but firmly, they insisted on an informal inspection of the building—or would madame prefer that they return with a search warrant and many suspicions?

Distinctly ungracious, the old lady finally agreed to let us look around. She owned the entire building, we discovered. It was a vast, ancient structure, stretching clear from the street on which the madame's little store fronted to the narrow *rue* behind it. Save for her, it was unoccupied, the ground floor doors and windows of that portion facing on the other street having been boarded up years before.

And then we came to the garden.

I was born and raised in New Orleans. I knew how often the dismal, dingy exteriors of the buildings in the *Vieux Carré* concealed exquisitely beautiful patios. I was well aware of the



pride many of the older Gallic-descended residents took in these tiny havens of rest.

Yet, when we stepped out into Madame Bercamier's garden, my jaw dropped in sheer stupefaction. Behind me, one of the plainclothesmen gasped out a startled, "*Mon Dieu!*"

The place was a riot of vivid, almost-tropical color. Banked masses of multi-hued flowers rose everywhere in luxuriant profusion. Yet so skillfully were they landscaped against the gray-green background of time-stained, mossy walls that the impression was not so much of brilliance as of incredible peace.

But even more than the flowers, it was the birds which caught one's eyes. Peacocks, lovebirds, cockatoos—a dozen varieties, there were. Beside their shimmering plumage, the flowers seemed dull and drab. Yet their cries, even, seemed fitted to this place of beauty—soft, low, melodious, without one harsh or raucous note. Free and uncaged, the lovely creatures swooped gracefully about the garden, or posed easily on convenient perches.

A cockatoo came winging to Madame Bercamier's shoulder, and for the first time the old lady smiled. She turned to us, suddenly human.

"Here I live out my life," she said simply. "The shop—all the rest—is but a necessary evil, *m'sieurs*. I endure it only that I may later return to this garden, to enjoy the beauty I have gathered here over the years."

One of the plainclothesmen bowed. "Of course, madame. It is truly lovely. Never have I seen its equal."

**I** DRIFTED away, discouraged. This was the last place unsearched. Yet we had found no trace of Francois. It was as if the earth had swallowed him up. I slumped onto a stone bench typi-

cal of those so often found in French Quarter patios, weary and sick of heart.

And then, as if drawn by a magnet, my eyes fell on the figure scuffed into the moss-shrouded brickwork of the walk!

"F"!

I came to my feet with a shocked exclamation.

"Francois!"

At last I had found some trace of my vanished friend! Only he would have unconsciously scuffed that letter! It was too much to lay to coincidence!

"What is it?"

It was one of the plainclothesmen speaking. But even before the words were out of his mouth, Madame Bercamier was in action.

She was between me and the officers. Now she turned. Scuttled toward me, her face all anxiety, as if she thought I was in distress.

"M'sieur! Is anything wrong?"

But her eyes belied the words. Black and beady, they flashed down momentarily to the spot on which my own were focused. Caught the scuffed "F."

Then, before my mind could grasp her purpose—before I could move to stop her—, she was upon me. She fluttered solicitously before me, her small, blue-veined hands apparently quieting me—actually pushing me back.

And her long black skirt, hanging to the ground, swept over the "F"!

Understanding burst upon me like a bombshell. With a hoarse cry I caught her wrists. Jerked her away.

I was too late. Her husy feet had raked the letter—only proof I had that my friend had been here—to oblivion!

The plainclothesmen grabbed me by the arms and held me fast.

"What's the meaning of this, you young hoodlum?" blazed the first, his face dark with anger. "What are you

trying to do to Madame Bercamier?"

Tersely, I explained. And I will give those officers credit for checking on my story promptly and thoroughly.

The old lady had done her work too well, however. Francois's initial was gone.

That about ended the investigation. I could see that my actions had convinced the detectives they were dealing with an aberrant mind, and that they were anxious to leave.

Their very attitude increased my determination to get to the bottom of the affair. With official sanction, if possible. But if necessary, without it.

I insisted on going back into that portion of the building fronting on the back street, away from madame's store. There, while pretending to search for further clues, I succeeded in surreptitiously unhooking the shutters of one of the windows leading out onto the iron-railed balcony so typical of the *Vieux Carré*. In so doing, I felt, I had at least insured myself of an easy means of entry into the Bercamier menage, should I need one.

That job completed, I allowed the plainclothesmen to persuade me to leave.

IT'S one thing, though, to decide in the heat of anger to burglarize a house; another to carry out such a plan after long and sober reflection. After all, I thought, as the days rolled by, perhaps my imagination *had* been playing tricks on me . . . and certainly Louisiana doesn't look kindly on those who break and enter. Madame Bercamier seemed like a harmless old creature, even if anti-social. Our search of her premises had revealed no concrete clue. And even her neighbors insisted that she lived alone—that no gorgeous blonde niece named Shayla shared her home.

So it was that spring turned to summer without any further trace of either Shayla or Francois. Time dulled my first frantic fears over my friend's fate. The stress of work occupied me. . . .

But now, in one brief moment, all my suspicions and perplexities were back again, writhing through my brain like a white-hot serpent of quandary. For here, coming toward me down this narrow street, were a man and—*Shayla!*

Two lovers, they were, to all appearances. Wandering artlessly through the French Quarter's cramped maze in a cloud of bliss. Young. Happy. Tight-wrapped in their own dream world. A sight to warm all hearts. . . .

And yet, not quite.

For, somehow, an inexplicable feeling of uneasiness was creeping over me. A premonition of dread, almost. A foreshadowing of dark things to come.

Where did that feeling come from?

Was it only a reflection of what I knew and suspected already—of Francois and his strange disappearance, and the ancient, musty curio shop in the little side street short blocks from Jackson Square, and the queer, nasty-tempered old lady who called herself Madame Bercamier?

Was it some seventh sense, warning me—clairvoyance, perhaps, or mental telepathy; or the "extra-sensory perception" of which the scientists talk?

Or was it Shayla, herself: unable despite all her loveliness to conceal completely the indefinable tension that crawled deep within her, like a tarantula hiding beneath an orchid's bloom?

To this day I do not know.

Yet come that feeling did. In seconds it hardened to conviction. Sent sudden icy chills racing through my veins.

THE pair was only a few feet away now. I huddled back still further

into the murky blackness of the archway from which I spied upon them.

It was well I did.

"... and you are beautiful, Shayla!" I heard the man exclaim. "You are the soul of beauty—"

"And you are a flatterer, Henri," the girl teased. "You say these things too well. You must have repeated them many times, to other girls."

"No! I swear it!"

Almost roughly, the man pushed her into the black shadows of the archway, while I pressed into the darkest depths. His arms embraced her. Hungrily, his lips sought hers.

"No, Henri! Not now." She avoided him skillfully. Her fingers touched his lips in a caress, taunting yet full of promise.

The young man was breathing hard.

"You are playing with me!" he cried in a low voice that trembled with passion. "Always you put me off. 'Not now, Henri,' you say. But how long must I wait? I want your kisses now—"

"Sshhh!" Shayla silenced him with another caress. "We are on the street, Henri. Do you think me a common *fille de joie*, to be made love to in taverns and alleys? Would you—"

"No, no. I did not mean it, Shayla—" Her companion's words gushed out helter-skelter in his haste to apologize. Then: "But I dream of your kisses, my dearest. I long for them. Must I wait forever—"

"Were we not on our way to my garden?"

"My darling! You mean—"

The girl moved, and a stray beam of moonlight illuminated her lips. They were curved in a voluptuously inviting smile. When she spoke, her voice was vibrant with allure.

"My aunt has gone out for the evening, Henri. We shall be alone."

"Then why wait? Let us be on—"

Together, they moved out of the archway and on down the street, the young gallant tautly eager, the girl somehow tense despite her easy air.

Madame Bercamier's shop, I knew, was two streets up and just around the corner. I acted quickly.

Keeping to the shadows, I slipped back along the street in the direction from which the two had come. Rounding the corner, I sprinted to the next street over, then toward the street on which the little store was located. By running at top speed, I was able to reach the shabby establishment ahead of them. I ducked into an alleyway across the street, there to lie in wait.

WITHIN a minute, the couple rounded the corner. They stopped in front of the shop, while Shayla fumbled in her purse. There was the faint clink of a key, and the door swung open. She and her companion disappeared within. The portal closed behind them.

I was running again almost before the bolt shot home. Back around the block. Seconds later, I approached the building from the rear, down the tunnel-like, pitch-black street behind it, where the overhang of balconies nearly shut out the night sky.

Headless of torn clothes and skinned knuckles, I scrambled up the wall—not nearly as difficult a job as it sounds, since the place was crumbling with age, giving plenty of niches for foot- and hand-holds. Nevertheless, I was panting hard by the time I dragged myself onto the balcony.

For a moment I hesitated, trying to quiet my breathing. And, at the same time, questions flashed through my mind: should I go on? Was it worth the chance? I weighed both sides—the danger of arrest, even imprisonment, versus the possibilities of finding what

had happened to my friend Francois.

It was Shayla who tilted the scale. Here, in this house, was the woman whose very existence had been denied. And it was while with her that Francois had disappeared. . . .

Almost belligerently, I strode down the balcony to the last window. I tugged at the shutter. It swung open easily. With only a slight creaking, the window raised. I crawled inside.

My visit of three months before had given me a good idea of the building's layout. Cautiously—and cursing the groanings of the floorboards—I sidled through the dusty rooms toward the patio. I knew precisely the vantage point for a clear view of the garden.

At last I reached the door I sought. Opened it gingerly. Stepped outside onto a sort of interior gallery. Dropped quietly to my knees and crawled along it until I reached a spot which gave me a veritable bird's-eye view of the whole courtyard. Lowering myself until I was lying on my stomach, I peered out cautiously through the wrought-iron bars of the railing.

Shayla and the young man already were in the garden. They were seated on the self-same bench before which I had found the scuffed "F."

The gallant's arm slid about Shayla's waist. He pulled her close to him. In the stillness of the night, I could hear his words.

"At last, my darling, we are alone!" he said. He bent his head to kiss her lips.

But the girl slipped away, lissome and hard to hold as the very beams of moonlight which bathed her lovely face.

"Shayla!" The man sprang after her.

She waved him back.

"I shall be but a moment, Henri. My aunt has some old wine. You will swear it is the pure nectar of the gods!"

SHE disappeared through a low door in the wall. I remembered one of the plainclothesmen mentioning that it led to the wine cellar. The young man resumed his seat on the bench.

A moment later the girl was back. She carried a curiously-shaped bottle and two wineglasses. One of the latter she handed to Henri. Still standing, she filled it.

"Taste it, Henri," she urged. "Never have you had its like before!"

The young man smiled.

"A toast, then!" he cried. "To you, Shayla! Your long life, good fortune, and happiness!" He drank.

The girl's smile was like a caress, but here eyes were as needles boring into his. She refilled his glass.

"And to us!" she pledged. "May we live our lives together!"

Again her companion downed the wine. But Shayla did not so much as raise her glass.

Henri, too, noticed it.

"Why don't you drink?" he asked. His voice was suddenly thick, his tone stupid.

The girl did not answer him, but her eyes still bored into his. All at once the beauty of her face seemed overshadowed by something inexpressibly evil. Chills of sheer, unreasoning terror raced up and down my spine. I clamped my teeth down tight on my tongue to keep them from chattering aloud.

Now Shayla leaned forward, and there was that in her which Macbeth saw in the three witches.

The glass fell from Henri's nerveless fingers; shattered into a thousand fragments on the cold brick of the walk. His head lolled back. His body sagged limp upon the bench, unconscious.

"May we live our lives together!" Shayla mocked aloud. "Yes, Henri! Long lives together! Oh, you'll get your wish!"

She straightened, then, and went back into the shop. When she returned to the patio, she was heavy-laden with strange objects—queer lamps that gleamed dully in the moonlight; a time-blackened caldron; a case filled with bottles and boxes.

And a book. A book such as you see in pictures of ancient times, thick and strangely-bound and beld tight shut by a brazen clasp.

First she arranged the lamps about the patio until even I could see that they formed the points of a Solomon's seal, with Henri's still figure in the center.

Next she took a queerly-shaped little knife and slashed the unconscious man's wrist, drawing off a rill of blood into the cauldron, where she mixed it with powders and liquids from the case of bottles and boxes.

Then, stepping outside the lines which connected the lamps to form the great seal, she dropped her clothing from about her, until she stood completely nude in the moonlight.

**B**UT not for long. From the little pile of objects she had brought from the shop she drew other garments of a kind I had never seen before—diaphanous, scant, and printed in bewildering patterns. They covered little—her breasts, her loins; nothing more.

Now, while the blood pounded in my temples, she turned back to the lamps. Lighted them, one by one. Placed still another beneath the caldron.

Seconds passed, turned to minutes. The minutes, too, went on their way, gone forever. Slowly, smoke began to curl up from the caldron.

As if it were a signal, Shayla picked up the great volume which lay outside the seal. Like one in a dream, she moved to a position directly in front of

Henri. Her eyes were glazed; her breath came faster.

And then she began to chant.

I can't remember all the words. Many I had never heard before. But I do know how they began:

"Oh, Ishtar! Oh, Astarte! Oh, Ash-toreth! Look down upon they daughter—"

On and on she chanted, her clear young voice rising like the wail of a mad wolf howling to the moon. My head began to hurt, and my throat turned dry and cottony. My eyes, too, blurred, until it seemed that Shayla was standing in evanescent mist. A blind, hideous panic was upon me, a fear that made all terrors I had ever known before seem trivial and childish. I wanted more than anything to break and run, but my legs seemed turned to water. I remember vaguely that I could feel the icy sweat of stark horror trickling down my sides. Too, I recall glancing at poor Henri, still lying collapsed and insensible upon the bench.

Then, suddenly, lightning was striking—a monster bolt, leaping from a cloudless sky straight down into Shayla's garden. Straight to the center of that great Solomon's seal. Straight to the spot where Henri lay.

I jerked as if the charge had gone through me. My head still ached, but everything was sharp and clear; the mist no longer shrouded Shayla.

But I had no eyes for her.

Instead, I stared at the bench—the bench where Henri had sprawled.

His clothes still lay there, limp and empty. But the man himself was gone out of them.

And on the breast of the still-buttoned shirt and coat there perched the figure of a great white cockatoo!

How long I lay there, eyes bugging, brain spinning, reason tottering, I do not know.

A low whistle brought me back.

It was Shayla, her lovely lips pursed. At the sound, the cockatoo winged its way toward her, perched upon her shoulder completely unafraid.

"Oh, Henri, you are beautiful!" the girl exclaimed. "Your feathers—they gleam like silver—"

Now, from every corner of the garden, other birds flew to her. They brushed against her, caressed her with their wings, nuzzled her with their bills, rested upon her arms and shoulders.

Her face radiant, glowing with happiness, the girl talked to them all as if they were her lovers—

"Ah, ma chère!"—to one probing behind her shell-pink ear—"You tickle!" And, to another, whose head was thrusting into the deep hollow between her breasts: "Edward! Stop it! What will all these others think!"

SHE was incredibly beautiful, standing there in the moonlight, lithe young body gleaming white against the darkness of the shrubbery. Her lovely lips were half-parted, her ripe, gently-swelling breasts rising and falling with each breath. Her eyes sparkled with the utter joy of living.

Suddenly, it dawned upon me:

*The evil had gone out of her!*

This was not the vaguely sinister figure of Shayla the temptress, luring men to a strange, dark doom!

No! This was another Shayla—a Shayla who was young, and gay, and bubbling with an almost-childish glee. A Shayla who asked nothing but the happiness of a life among the adoration of these birds in this bit of heaven which was her garden!

"Schizophrenic!" I exclaimed under my breath. "It can't be true, but it is! Half of her is devil, half angel. A female Jekyll-Hyde!"

Then I stopped short.

What about Henri? What about Francois? What had happened to them? Had they, by some forgotten necromancy, been transformed into two of the birds which now fluttered about Shayla?

The thought sent a shiver through me, but I cut it short.

"It can't be!" I told myself. "This is 1942, not the Middle Ages. We have science, not witchcraft." I laughed nervously. "I must have been out of my head. Delirious. Yes. That's it. Delirious."

There was a little rustle of wings close beside me. I turned my head, all at once taut again.

A dazzling, rainbow-hued bird had alighted beside me. It stared at me curiously, head cocked to one side, one foot scratching at the dirt-encrusted floor of the gallery.

I relaxed. Shooed it into the air again.

"Back to your pretty mistress, Beautiful!" I commanded under my breath. For the first time that night I allowed myself the luxury of a smile.

And then my eyes fell. Lit on the spot where that unique bird had stood. My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. My eyes tried to escape their sockets. My brain exploded in a ball of fire. I seemed to be falling . . . falling . . . falling. . .

*For there, scratched on the gallery floor by that bird's claw, was the letter "F"!*

GRAY dawn was breaking when I recovered consciousness, and Shayla's garden was silent and deserted. I turned over slowly and lay for a long moment staring up at the sky's pall. My head still throbbed painfully, and to the thick dryness of my mouth had been added a distinctly unpleasant taste which my reeling mind morbidly re-

fused to compare to anything but the ashes of a newly-cremated corpse.

At last, wearily, I arose and retreated the way I had come, through the rear portion of the building to the back street. The narrow *rue* was still deserted this early, fortunately, so I dropped from the balcony to the pavement and stumbled away.

FOR twenty-one hours, then, I slept like one drugged. Never had I been so unutterably weary.

When I at last awoke again, however, my brain was clear and keen. I knew precisely what I wanted to do, and how to go about it.

First I went to the library. The books I consulted brought askance glances from the staff—Summers on witchcraft and lycanthropy, Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*, a dozen and one strange, mouldering volumes on sorcery and necromancy and all the black arts.

I departed with one grim fact stabbing rapier-like through my brain:

The occult's dark history recorded innumerable instances in which human beings had been transformed into animals!

That was enough for me.

My apartment's colored cleaning-woman gave me the address of an *obeah*-man. He dealt in charms and spells and amulets, she said, and he knew the spirits and their ways.

I found him in his hovel deep in the Negro quarter, a tiny, wizened black man with piercing, jet-bead eyes. His kinky hair was pure white. At first he opened his door only a crack. Then, when I told him who had sent me, he moved aside enough to let me in.

A charnel-house stench struck me like a physical thing as I stepped across the threshold. My stomach crawled within me. For a moment it seemed as if I could not stand it—that I would

have to flee.

Then I forced myself to look around. My eyes widened, and well they might, for few stranger places had I ever seen. Sleazy black hangings draped walls and windows alike, giving the chamber an atmosphere of shrouded gloom. Bundles of herbs hung from the rafters. Bones—and there were more than one human skull among them—were heaped in one corner. Indescribable thaumaturgic objects, beyond my ken to name or identify, littered a dozen stands and shelves. A lone, guttering candle on a rickety table gave weird light. Its flickerings in the draft set uncanny shadows dancing a ghastly rigadon that found their echo in the quiverings of my nerves.

"What you want, white man? Why you come?"

It was the wary, sullen voice of the *obeah*-man. He stood with his back against the door, his beady eyes sparkling with suspicion.

"I want a charm," I answered.

"What charm you want? What you 'feared of?"

I hesitated, torn between a desire for secrecy and the realization that only by speaking freely could I hope to attain my goal. Then, at last:

"There is a woman," I said. "She is a witch. She has turned my best friend into a hird. I want him back."

How strange it sounded! I half-wondered if I were mad. If, perchance, some corner of my brain had revolted. But the wizened witchdoctor nodded as if my words were commonplace.

"Can't do," he mumbled. "Only woman who cast that spell can bring back your friend. Too strong for me to break."

"That's what I thought," I agreed. "That's why I wanted a charm. Something to protect me, something that will make me strong, so that I can force

her to bring him back."

**A** GAIN the Negro eyed me. There was new interest in his glance.

"Not good," he said. "This woman—got strong magic to cast such spell. Maybe she get you, even with charm."

"That's right," I admitted. "But it's a chance that's got to be taken. I want you to do all you can for me. If it fails—" I shrugged.

My words must have convinced the *obeah*-man of my sincerity. He suddenly became animated. For an hour he questioned me as to every detail of Francois's disappearance and all that had followed. When I described what had happened in Shayla's garden, he turned ashen. His whole body trembled.

"No, white man!" he exclaimed. "You got no chance. That woman—she is devil. Don't never see her again. Go away. Far away—"

I shook my head. "No. My mind's made up. My friend Francois deserves at least an effort—"

He argued. He pleaded. He begged. But I was adamant.

At last the witch-doctor threw up his hands in despair and set to work. He mixed herbs and powders and potions in a kettle. Then, motioning me close, he gashed my wrist as Shayla had done to Henri the night before. Poured the blood into the vessel. Lit a fire beneath it.

There was chanting, then, and the beating of a tom-tom, and the sacrifice of a coal-black cock, while a hell's broth of fumes and nauseous fragrance rose from the kettle. I felt queer and giddy. The room seemed to spin around me. A dozen *obeah*-men swayed before me. Grew together again into one wizened Negro. He seized a mug from a shelf. Filled it at the kettle. Held it out to me.

"Here! Drink!"

My eyes riveted to his, I gulped down

the fiery, stenchful liquid as if it were water. My will was not my own; I was like a man in a stupor.

But as the brew reached my stomach; as it seized me in its grip, strength seemed to flow through me. The world suddenly sharpened to crystal clarity.

I stood up, still staring at the *obeah*-man. I could feel the pull of the great muscles in my neck and back as they tightened and relaxed.

A smile came over the witch-doctor's wrinkled face.

"It is good!" he declared. "It is strong medicine. The charm has taken."

"Then I'm safe?"

Slowly, he nodded.

"I think so, white man. Only most powerful sorcerer can touch you now. And with this"—he held out one black hand—"no one can!"

I reached for the object he extended to me. Examined it curiously.

**I**T looked, at first, like a great glass eye. But I soon saw that it was not glass, but stone, and that it was of natural, rather than artificial, origin. Translucent, it glowed in the candle-light like a sinister radiance, as if it were endowed with a weird, malevolent personality all its own.

"Eyestone!" said the Negro. And, as I looked puzzled: "Very old. Very powerful. Great magic. My people brought it from across the water. From Guinea. While you hold it, no spirit, no charm, can touch you!"

There was something in the way he said it that sent a little ripple of excitement through me. All at once I was anxious to face Shayla. To finish up this incredible adventure once and for all.

"How much do I owe you?" I demanded.

"You owe nothing. You buy charm,



it no good. Some day, maybe, you give me gift. But not now. . . ."

Still gripping the eyestone, I thanked him and left.

Coming out into the sunlight again was like awakening from a nightmare. All that had gone before suddenly seemed incredible . . . fantastic . . . mirage-like. I felt almost foolish. But there was something within me that turned my footsteps toward Madame Bercamier's little curio shop.

The old lady was as inimical as ever. She could not have welcomed a leper with less enthusiasm.

"What do you want?" she demanded peevishly. "What are you doing back here? Don't you know when you're not welcome—"

"Indeed I do," I retorted. "In this case, I even know *why* I'm not welcome." And then, as she stared up at me, mouth petulant: "It's because *you* know that I wasn't lying when I said my friend Francois Corral disappeared while he was visiting your niece, Shayla—"

"I have no—"

"I know. You haven't any niece, and if you did have, she wouldn't be out with anyone named Francois Corral." I brought my fist down on the rickety counter with a bang. "Well, maybe you haven't any niece. Maybe you haven't any birds in your garden, either. Maybe your garden itself is a mirage—"

"Please, please, m'sieur—"

I caught the spark of worry that had sprung so suddenly into the madame's black eyes. Ruthlessly, I pursued my advantage.

"Why try to pretend?" I badgered her. "Do you think all this covering up you're doing fools me? Do you think I don't know what happened to Francois, and Henri, and Edward, and all the rest?"

And then, leaning forward until my face nearly touched hers, I hurled my heaviest, most deadly bolt—

"*Do you think I don't know that Shayla is a sorceress and that she's turned my friend into a bird?*"

NEVER have I seen such terror as leaped into Madame Bercamier's eyes in that instant!

But she fought it down.

"Are you mad, young man?" she snapped crossly. "Do you not know that the Dark Ages are over?"

Exaltation soared within me. There was a tremor in her voice!

"Oh, yes, madame," I nodded. "You are right. The Dark Ages are past. The law denies witchcraft's existence. No court can touch you or your niece.

"But then again," I went on, "you live in the *Vieux Carre*, madame. The Old Quarter. There are those here who still believe in witches." A little pause, while I gazed straight at her significantly. "They would be interested to know what I have discovered, Madame Bercamier."

"No, no!"

The old lady's voice broke. She clutched at my arm, her face suddenly weary and defeated.

"Please, do not tell them!" she implored. "Give me but a chance to explain, young man—"

Even as she spoke, she scurried around the end of the counter and locked the street door. Then, turning, she caught my arm again and pulled me toward the inner rooms.

"Come, sit with me in the garden," she begged, tugging at my sleeve. "I shall tell you everything, m'sieur. About Shayla. About your friend—"

Psychic danger signals flashed in my brain. I thrust my right hand into my coat pocket. Gripped the *obeah*-man's eyestone tightly.

Madame Bercamier led me on into the patio. Over to the worn stone bench on which the man called Henri had sprawled two nights before.

"Sit down!" she commanded.

My fingers still tight-wrapped around the eyestone, I obeyed.

The old lady made no move to take the place beside me. Instead, she still stood before me, her black eyes staring straight into mine. I could feel a sudden evil presence—a malignant *something* worming its way into control centers of my brain.

The red lights of my mind flashed brighter, faster. Instinctively I fought against the leech-like entity that sought to seize me. My mouth went dry, and my teeth clamped tight together. My breath came faster. I could feel the veins swelling in throat and temples.

But still those black eyes held me, as a cobra's hold a rabbit. I stared into them, back into depths of iniquity such as I had never dreamed existed. Back through a thousand years of awful evil to the blazing fires of hell itself.

I fought those eyes. With all my will-power, all my being. The muscles at the back of my neck drew taut with effort. My fists ached to the elbows, so tightly were they clenched.

I tried to speak, but could not. I tried to rise, and failed. Every ounce of strength, of nerve, of will, was concentrated in that Battle of the Eyes. Mine against Madame Bercamier's. My soul against hers.

Giddiness began to invade me. The world to swirl about me.

Still I fought on.

The madame's eyes were like glowing coals, now. Burning into mine. Tearing at my reason. Assaulting my very being.

The other's face swam before me. Its outlines blurred; disappeared. Only those two awful eyes remained, searing

my soul like twin jets of hell-fire. I felt myself reeling. Vaguely I caught the hideous grin of triumph that split Madame Bercamier's face—

AND then, like the blast of Gabriel's trumpet, the words of the *obeah*-man as he handed me the eyestone came back:

"No spirit, no charm, can touch you!"

It was as if a runner, exhausted and staggering, had suddenly caught his second breath.

New power of will surged through my weary, cracking brain. I seemed to come to life, dragging myself out of the very Valley of Death and into the light again. A sudden confidence that I could move flowed into my veins.

Slowly, very slowly, my clenched fists came out of my coat pockets. My elbows pressed into the bench's back. The muscles of my legs tightened. I drew myself erect. I sucked in a deep breath, still fighting . . . fighting . . . fighting. . . I tensed. Set myself for the effort—

And then, with a terrific jerk, I tore my gaze from the woman's!

Victory!

She stood, for a moment, like a scarecrow hung on a rope. A choking sob wrenched itself from somewhere deep within her.

Then her knees were buckling and she was crumpling to the brick walk. Old. Broken. Shabby in her black silk dress.

For a long moment I stared at her. At last, however, I stepped over to where she lay. Still clutching the eyestone in my right fist, I lifted her limp form and carried it to the bench. Laid her down there. As I did so, a frayed black reticule slipped from her nerveless fingers to the ground. I bent to pick it up.

The Aurora Borealis exploded in my brain.

Even as I pitched to the ground, it seemed, I could see the old woman's face leering down at me in fiendish triumph, some kind of short club gripped in one hand.

Too, I felt the eyestone falling from my paralyzed fingers into the shrubbery, while the *obeah*-man's words came back to mock me:

"No spirit, no charm, can touch you!"

He hadn't said anything about black-jacks.

The moon was up when I recovered consciousness. I was back on the stone bench, too—though somewhat handicapped by the ropes which now bound me.

For a while I studied the dappled patterns of moonlight and shadow on courtyard's wall. Then, hearing some slight sound off to one side, I turned my head.

Madame Bercamier was bringing out the same strange objects I had seen here two nights before—the caldron, the lamps, all the rest.

But where was Shayla?

Even as the question leaped into my mind, the old woman selected an oddly-shaped bottle from the assortment in the case. She lifted it to her lips. Drank deeply.

The next instant I stiffened with incredulity. Stark disbelief hugged out my eyes. I swallowed hard.

The madame was shedding her clothes.

And as she shed them, her whole being—body, appearance, personality—sloughed off with them!

SHE was chanting, now, in a weird minor key. Yet as she sang, her voice changed, from the harsh cackle of an age-ridden hag to the soft, dulcet

tones of a young girl.

Age's stiffness of joint and harshness of line were slipping away, too. Falling off as a snake sheds its skin. Disappearing like dew before the sun.

And in their place was blooming the radiant blonde loveliness of Shayla!

Gradually, incredibly, her silky, seductive figure rose from the cramped clumsiness of Madame Bercamier. The homely face and parchment skin gave way to the breath-taking, peach-bloom beauty of the young girl, with her warm red lips and slow, unfathomable eyes.

Nude at last she stood in the silvery moonlight, on tiptoe, arms stretched above her back-flung head, as if demanding even jealous Luna's reluctant admiration for the willowy liteness of her youthful body and the proud perfection of her firm, uptilted breasts.

All-too-brief seconds she held the pose. Then, relaxing, her eyes caught mine upon her. Smiling and unashamed, she approached me.

"Am I not beautiful?" she appealed. "Have not the dark gods lavished their favors upon me?"

Mute with fascination, I nodded.

"Soon you, too, may adore me!" she went on. "You will join the birds, my lovers. You may caress me with your wings, your head, your body. Your beak will taste my kisses—"

A peacock strutted out of the shadows. Preened itself against Shayla's shapely calves.

"You mean," I choked, "that you would make me like this? That you would transform me into a bird?"

The girl's eyes widened just a trifle. "Of course. You have learned my secret. It becomes necessary, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"But why?" I exploded. "Why should you change men to birds? How can one so lovely do things so horrible—"

"But it is not horrible!" she protested. "The birds—they are my lovers. They are happy. They adore me. And I, too, am happy. My heart is joyous in their beauty."

"But why? Why do you do it? If it is adoration you desire, men will give you more than can any bird—"

"Oh, no!" Shayla shook her comely head until the silvery blonde tresses shimmered like dancing waves in the moonlight. "No! Men are dangerous. They make you love them—and then they break your heart. They are beasts—even worse. They are ruthless and cruel and brutal, and they lust after all women with strange passions."

Sheer bewilderment was in my gaze. That, and sudden compassion.

"Have you been hurt, then?" I asked. "Has some man so wounded you that you feel this way about all?"

"Oh no. I do not know men's ways myself. But my father warned me of them."

"Your father?"

SHE nodded simply. "Yes. He is dead now, these ten years." Tears filled her eyes. "He was a great wizard. All his life he studied. He taught me much, though I was but a little girl. When he knew he was going to die, he even developed the potion which makes me old and hideous; he said a young girl left alone in the world would not be safe, but that no one would bother an old woman."

"How old are you now?" I asked, fascinated.

"Twenty-three."

"And where did you learn to change men to birds?"

"That I taught myself, from the old books of magic and of spells. In ancient days the sorcerers often did such deeds, and from them, I learned how to do them, too."

"But what gave you the idea? Why did you want to make men into birds to begin with?"

I shall never forget the queer, half-timid little smile that played about Shayla's lips at that moment.

"I was lonely," she said simply.

"And so you went out and picked up men," I muttered half-aloud. "Yet, because your father taught you to be afraid of men, you didn't react normally. Instead of going on with these affairs, you transformed them into birds by some weird magic and substituted their admiration and response to you for the human love you really desired."

"That is not so!" she cried. "Men cannot love. They are cruel beasts—"

"Not all men," I interrupted. "Some men are kind. Your own father—"

"I will not listen! Already I have delayed too long!" She was suddenly curt. There was a little gleam of fear deep in her eyes. "Now you, too, must join my flock—"

I mustered every ounce of sincerity there was in me. Every fragment of psychology I knew. The grim realization was growing upon me that if I did not now persuade her to free me, I likely never would have the chance again. My body all at once was tense against the cords that bound me, my forehead wet with sweat.

"You were but a little girl when your father died, Shayla," I told her carefully. "Today you are a woman. A beautiful woman. Your father's advice to you today would be different from that he gave you when you were but a child. Now that you are grown, he would want you to react as a woman. He would want you to enjoy the love that you deserve. To live the normal life that is your heritage. He spoke to you as he did because there are evil men who would have harmed you had you trusted them. But he surely never

dreamed that you would grow old here, hiding your youth and beauty in this garden, refusing to claim the love and happiness that is your due—"

**L**INES of worry, of bewilderment, touched the girl's face. There was doubt in her eyes. I could almost see my words turning in her mind. Hope leaped within me.

"Are you to go through life haunted by fear?" I pressed. "Are you ever to be searching out new men to lure here? After you have made them birds, can you ever change them back to human form, so that you can bask in the warm glow of real love—"

"No, I cannot." She shook her lovely head slowly. "Once I tried to bring one back. His body came. But his mind was gone. It did not bridge the gap—"

"Then why do you talk of changing me to one of your pets? You do not want me so. You want real love, real response, real affection and understanding—"

"No!" She sprang back with a swirl of golden hair, as if she was tossing off a loathesome veil. "No! My father told me men were like you. That you would talk softly. Tell me things I wanted to hear. Persuade me to do your will."

Her eyes flashed. Her face was taut with strain.

"But I will not! You shall not win me over! No! You shall be with the rest, a bird to sing in my lovely garden and to adore me with all your heart!"

"Shayla! No! You can't—"

Heedless to my frantic pleas, she rushed to prepare for the awful ceremony.

First came a glass of the strange potion she had given Henri as a preliminary to his transformation.

"Drink it!" she commanded, and I caught that ageless gleam of evil that

was her aura in this devil's work.

"I won't!"

"Ah, but you will!"

Her slender hand shot out. She gripped my nose. Forced me to open my mouth or suffocate. Bound and helpless as I was, my struggles availed nothing. She poured the syrupy liquid down my throat. Two wineglassfuls of it.

I felt a numbness creeping over my body. My arms and legs felt cold and distant, as if they did not belong to me. The garden was a silvery blur; Shayla a lovely wraith. I slumped limply against the back of the bench in a strange coma, hanging between oblivion and consciousness, only vaguely aware of what was going on around me.

Again Shayla was arranging the lamps to mark the six points of the Solomon's seal.

Frantically I tried to wrench myself from the stupor. Struggled to make my paralyzed muscles respond to the foggy biddings of my aching brain.

Shayla came toward me. Her breasts rose and fell as she stood before me, tight-gripped in her unholy, all-consuming passion. Her eyes were like lusting globules of sin, and her ripe red lips, half-parted, sent weird vampiric visions crawling through my dulling mind. She gripped the sacrificial knife in her right hand.

Then, while I lay mute and flaccid, the sorceress raised the knife. Plunged it into my unresisting wrist. Cupped the blood that gushed forth in a raw, red gout.

Back to the caldron, next. Measuring and stirring that devil's brew.

**A**GAIN she donned the flimsy garments she had worn that other night. Lighted the lamps. Heated the caldron.

I watched that black kettle. My mind flashed back to the awful moment, two nights before, when the stuff within it finally bubbled and boiled. The moment, too, when Shayla picked up that sinister tome from which she chanted incantations to forgotten powers best left let lie.

The smoke came.

Shayla picked up the book.

*"Oh, Ishtar! Oh, Astarte! Oh, Ash-toreth! Look down upon thy daughter—"*

My eyes were wide open. I did not even have the power to shut them. My limbs were like alien things, unresponsive to my mightiest efforts.

A thousand years of wickedness rang through Shayla's voice. Her lush body writhed and swayed like evil incarnate.

I prayed.

No. It was not a prayer. Rather, a plea. An entreaty. A frenzied, screaming supplication to the powers of light and good to save me . . . to drag me back . . . to preserve from the thing acoming. Yet wordless, silent, for I could not speak.

The muscles stood out beneath the velvet skin of the lovely witch's throat. Her pearly teeth were bared in a grimace of agony and strain. Her voice was a hoarse, wild shriek in the night. And then it came.

Out of the far black reaches of the sky, white fire streaked down to bathe me. My body was breaking into the dust from which it sprung. My soul was roasting in hell's hottest ovens. My brain was collapsing into nothingness.

A whistle, low and clear as a winter's night, slashed through an infinity of eons to my ears.

I opened my eyes.

Shayla still stood before me, her lovely lips pursed. But her face had changed. The tension now was gone.

The evil had evaporated. No sorceress was this; only a young and beautiful girl.

Then, suddenly, before I realized what I was doing, I swooped toward her. Alighted on her soft, silky shoulder. Startled, my eyes flashed back. My clothes lay limp upon the bench. A litter of cords—the bonds that had held me—were about them.

Mind and body alike, I tottered. Instinctively, my arms shot out to balance me.

Again I reeled—for feathers clothed them!

*I was a bird!*

Shayla's hand moved up. Caressed me gently.

"Ah, my darling!" she murmured. "None of my pets are as beautiful as you. Pure white, you are! Ah, my lovely one! The plans I have for you!"

She kissed the sweeping down-curve of my throat, and despite my mind's command a thrill surged through me.

The devil must have laughed.

**S**TRANGE indeed were the days that followed. I, who had been a man, lived the life of a bird in Shayla's garden.

I discovered, before even the first night had faded, that I was different from my fellows of the flock. To begin with, I was of a species unrepresented among them. Pure white and a full foot tall, I stood out among them like the proverbial sore thumb.

There was another and more important difference, however. I still had my intelligence! Whereas, one and all, the others' minds were gone. All that remained was instinct—a desire to eat and drink, to sleep, and to adore Shayla. Beyond that, they knew nothing. Even the brilliantly-colored fowl I had identified as Francois was the same. True, the creature still

scratched that tell-tale "F" wherever it went. But its brain was a bird's; the doodling apparently was only a reflex action somehow held over from the amnesic past.

Life became for me a deadly monotonous routine. By daylight, I flew about the garden or rested on one of the many conveniently-placed perches. When I saw Shayla during these hours, it was only as Madame Bercamier, shriveled and ancient and cantankerous.

But with the night, madame would lock up the shop and come into the garden. Greedily she gulped down the powerful brew that transformed her back to her real self. With gay abandon she shed the drab garments that characterized her to the outer world. Sloughed off with them the whole of Madame Bercamier, to be replaced by the radiant loveliness of Shayla's own self.

Then we frolicked, we birds, gathering 'round her in such a flurry of wings that sometimes she was almost hidden from view.

"My beauties!" she cried joyously. "When did any girl ever have such lovers as you are? What man could compare with you, who ask nothing and give everything?"

Her gaiety was so infectious that even I joined.

So we lived, day by day, in this queer, private world of ours. So we lived, indeed, until I began to wonder if perhaps Shayla was not right; if perchance this secluded Shangri-La was not a truer happiness than the callous rush of life outside.

And then came the full moon.

I knew, the instant Shayla entered the garden that night, that something was different. The gaiety, the effervescence, was gone out of her, replaced by an eerie tension. Her eyes no

longer were sparkling; only dark and brooding. The grace of her movements suddenly was almost feline.

My fellows sensed the tautness, too—even better than I, perhaps, for they were pure primitive, unhampered by the chill of intelligence and logic. They huddled in the far corners of the patio, deep in the shadows of the trees and shrubbery, their voices silenced.

STRANGELY, sinisterly quiet, Shayla moved among us. She shot lightning-quick glances among us, seeking out our darkest hiding-places unerringly. Once her eyes fell on me, and a little chill swept through my body.

Slowly, then, she turned to face the rising moon, a great silver coin against the velvet backdrop of the sky. Raised her arms in a gesture of supplication.

"Oh, my goddess! My protectress! Tonight I do homage to thee! Tonight I pay my tribute unto thee, blood tribute. . ."

On she went, and on, mouthing weird phrases, supplicating darkly. And as she spoke, the happy, child-like Shayla I had come to know slowly vanished, swallowed up by that other part of her, the side I had almost forgotten.

For she was Shayla the sorceress now. Shayla, the witch woman. The soul of evil, whose lush body lured men to their dooms, and whose ripe lips twisted in a smile that made mockery of all the world holds sacred.

"Blood tribute!" she chanted. "Blood tribute I shall give you!"

And then, so fast the eye could hardly follow, her hand shot out. Caught the cockatoo that had been Henri by the throat. Dragged him, wildly flapping, from his perch.

Over to the stone bench she carried him. Lighted lamps to flare in some cabalistic symbolism about it, until the

bench itself rose black and menacing in the flickering shadows, a rude altar to black gods.

Was the throbbing beat I heard only the pounding of my own fearful heart? Or were ghost-drums booming in the night, keeping time to the mad chantings that rolled from Shayla's lips?

Silver flashed in her hand—the silver of a sacrificial knife.

"Blood tribute I pay thee, my goddess," she chanted, "blood tribute to bind us together. *I give thee my lover—!*"

The knife flashed down. A single wild scream of agony welled in the cockatoo's throat—died again in a gurgle of spurting blood.

"Blood tribute, my mistress! I dance for thee in homage, around this sacrifice!"

Dance! It was a rigadon of death. A mad tarantella. A carmagnole of lust and passion. Around and around she spun, and through the air, in an orgy never seen outside a witch's sabbat, while we poor birds clung shivering to our perches. Until, at last, she fell exhausted to the ground.

Panting, she lay there, her nude body white against the darkness of the grass.

My eyes were on her, but I saw nothing. Waves of nausea and of horror succeeded each other, sweeping over me like alternating waves of icy water, leaving me weak and gasping. I closed my eyes, tried to shake off the hideousness of this night.

The next instant my feet were jerked from under me. My eyes flashed open from sheer shock.

I was in Shayla's arms!

SHE still was breathing hard, and her breasts were hot against my feathered body. Her fingers stroked my head and neck.

"You are next, my lovely one!" she

whispered, and her voice was low and throaty and crawling with black abominations. "Be happy while you may, my beauty, for my goddess must be appeased with sacrifices. For now, you live. But when again the moon comes full, there must be blood tribute!"

Then, ever so gently, she replaced me on my perch, her lovely lips yet twisted in that ghastly, evil smile, and her eyes aflame with hell's own fire.

I still was sitting there in stunned helplessness when dawn came. My brain rang with her words: "You are next. When again the moon comes full, there must be blood tribute!"

Was this, then, to be the end? A knife plunged in my throat, and my life's blood gushing out onto the earth, and a madwoman chanting homage to the devil above the limp lump of flesh and feathers that had been me? Was I thus to die?

"There must be a way out!" I told myself fiercely a thousand times. "There must be some way of escape. I am an intelligent man. My brain is still good. Surely I can think of a solution!"

Yes, there must be some solution. But what was it?

Preoccupied, unthinking, I soared to the other end of the garden. What was I to do?

My wings!

That was it! I could fly away. True, I would not be as contented as I had come to feel in Shayla's garden. But at least I would be alive. I would be free.

Gingerly, I tried it, wondering why none of us birds had thought of this before. My powerful wings carried me up . . . up . . . up, over the top of the building . . . out into the open sky.

I was free! I could come and go at will! I need no longer fear the evil side of Shayla and the things it planned for me!

I folded my wings and plummeted



earthward like a hawk. The whistle of the air as the ground rushed up to meet me was a jubilant song. I was free! I was free! I was free!

Down I came. Down below the roof of the building. Into the patio again. I pulled up short in my dive. Zoomed upward again, rejoicing in my newfound freedom. Let myself drop more gently to a perch atop the stone seat. Breathing a sigh of relief, I relaxed. At last fell asleep in the golden glory of the morning sunlight.

The next instant, so it seemed, my feet were snatched from under me. I jerked awake to the tune of Madame Bercamier's cackling laughter.

"So you thought to try your wings, eh?" she cried triumphantly, her fingers tight about my legs. "Maybe I've misjudged you. Maybe you birds *can* think and understand. But be that as it may; you shall not get away from me!"

**P**ANIC rose within me like a tidal wave. I struck at her face and eyes with my beak. My wings beat about her head. My feet tried vainly to claw her.

"No! You are wasting your time!" Her harsh laughter mocked me, and she held me away at arm's length until she could pinion my wings. Then, holding me beneath her arm, she trudged into the building, still chuckling.

My brain was awirl with fear. Was I to die now? Was I to have no chance at all? Savagely I cursed myself for my foolhardiness in returning to the garden.

A moment later I breathed easier. The madame had not picked up the sacrificial knife. Instead, she held a pair of scissors.

And then, before I realized what was happening, she was snipping at my feathers, laughing the while.

"So you'd fly away, my pretty one?"

she chortled nastily. "So you'd desert my hospitality?" Her fingers were moving, scissors snipping. "Well, we shall see how far you can fly with your wings clipped!"

So it was done. My wings were clipped. I was turned back into the garden, free to run at will, but completely incapable of flying more than a few feet at a time—certainly not enough ever to top the patio's high walls.

Again I relapsed into despair. The horror of what had happened to the bird that had been Henri crept into my mind; filled it to overflowing, until I thought I would go mad. Frantically I fought against it, struggling instead to think of a way out.

But to no avail. Days came and went, and still I could not find an answer. Nights rolled by, one after another, while I watched the moon change shape, my brain afire with panic.

Shayla now was her other self. Warm and tender and happy. And there were nights, too, when she would suddenly grow sober.

Always it was me she picked to share these moments with her.

"Am I really wrong, my darling?" she would whisper. "Are there perhaps such men as you described—men like my father, gentle and kind and loving?"

Her eyes would be misty when she talked thus. Misty and troubled. And sometimes she would say,

"Oh, I am so lonely! If only you could answer! If only you could tell me!"

And I—I could do nothing. Nothing but sit on her knee or shoulder, going stark, staring mad from the futility and hopelessness of it all as the number of days before the next full moon grew fewer, and fewer, and fewer. . . .

And then, out of a clear blue sky, it came to me!

If only I could talk back. . . .

Well, why not?

Many birds *could* talk! I would learn to do likewise—and would persuade Shayla to spare me!

**T**HAT night, when she called to me, I paid her no heed. I was too busy with my new task.

It was not easy, I discovered. My new mouth was not well adapted to framing intelligible syllables. A dozen times, as the days wore on, I swore it was impossible. That no bird ever could master English sufficiently to carry on an intelligent conversation.

But always, ahead, loomed the vision of a stone sacrificial altar in the moonlight, with Shayla chanting barbarically beside it. It goaded me on, night and day. It would not let me rest. My dreams were haunted by it, my sleep cut short.

And so, to save myself from sheer madness at the prospect, I kept on, practicing interminably at pronunciation. Work . . . work . . . while the fateful eve of the full moon grew closer . . . closer . . . closer. . . .

When the evening before my sacrifice arrived, I could restrain myself no longer. It was now or never!

Shayla was more lovely than ever that night. She smiled as I hurried down the walk to meet her. Raised me to a perch on her shoulder.

"Ah, my white beauty!" she laughed gaily. "How are you? Have you been lonely?"

I swallowed hard, breathed a silent prayer. Here, at last, was the supreme test!

"Yes, Shayla, I have been lonely," I answered.

She gave a little shriek of terror and whirled about, as if expecting to see some stranger standing in the doorway.

"Do not be afraid," I reassured her,

confidence surging through me at my success. "It is only me."

"You!"

"Yes." I bobbed my head in a nod. "You have often said that you were lonely. You have wished that I could talk to you. And so, to please you, I have taught myself to do so."

"But—how can you—"

"You mean, how do I have enough intelligence left, after my transformation?"

"Yes. That is it."

"Of that I am not sure," I answered slowly. "Perhaps it is only chance. But I think it is something more. I think it is because I am not meant to live as a bird . . . nor to die as a sacrifice!"

She stared at me. I could almost see her brain working. Fascination, and perhaps a little fear, were in her eyes.

"My life is charmed," I went on. "Before I came to visit you that afternoon you captured me, I went to an *obeah*-man. A voodoo doctor. A worker in magic and spells like yourself.

"He cast a spell over me, to protect me from your magic. It was not strong enough to save my body, but it did save my mind, my brain, my soul."

"So that is it." She nodded slowly. "I see it now."

"That charm preserves me," I hampered on. "It keeps me a man, even though my body is that of a bird. That is why you cannot kill me, Shayla. You have sacrificed birds to your gods. But you cannot sacrifice a man, a human being—"

**N**O! No! She covered her ears with her hands. "I will not listen! I will not let you lead me from my path! You have been promised; you must die!"

"But why?" I badgered. "Why need I be killed? It is wrong, all wrong. Your father—he would not sanction it,

for you say he was kind and good. He would not want to see the blood of human sacrifice upon your hands—"

"Stop! I will not listen!"

Her voice was an anguished sob. With one wild blow she dashed me from her shoulder. Fleed into the security of the building, away from the sound of my voice.

I had failed!

Dazed, broken, I lay there, engulfed in the black abyss of despond. The last spark of hope within my feathered breast flickered and died. Again that awful vision of the sacrificial altar rose to haunt me—me, who must wait until that keen knife claimed him; me, who had not even the power to die by his own hand!

Surely hours passed before I recovered from that dull stupor of despair, for the night was cold ere I at last lurched to my feet. Weary, heedless of where I went, I stumbled across the patio.

And then, beneath my feet, a chill gleam caught my eye.

Why, at that moment, did I pay it heed? What was there about it to hold my attention, even through the semi-coma of hypochondria?

To this day I do not know.

But catch my eye it did. Almost without thinking, I pecked at it experimentally. It rolled into clear view, like a big, malevolent marble—

The *obeah*-man's eyestone!

For a long moment I stared at it as it lay there in the dirt and rubble. I thought of that fateful afternoon when I had been given the blow on the head that brought me, eventually, to my avian state. I remembered how tightly I had clutched the translucent ball. How swiftly it had rolled from between my fingers when the club came down.

I managed the ornithic equivalent of

a sour grin.

So this was to be that African talisman's final resting-place!

The next instant the mock mirth froze in my spinning brain.

My mind was racing back . . . back . . . back, to one of those sable-hued tomes I had consulted during my sketchy researches into the occult. Remembering a strange illustration and the brief descriptive paragraph beside it.

"Don't be a fool!" the pessimist in me flashed back. "You're done for. Why waste your energy?"

"*Anything* is worth trying now!" I retorted half-aloud.

"What have you got to go on?" jibed Pessimism. "You don't know what you're talking about—"

"I shall find a way! I must! I *won't* die!"

I STILL was studying the talisman when, around eight o'clock in the morning, Madame Bercamier stepped into the garden.

Hastily I rolled the eyestone back into a crevice.

Shaking her head wearily, the old woman turned to re-enter the building. I sprinted after her, slipping and stumbling in my haste. Hung close on her heels. Managed to slip through the doorway at the same time she did.

Madame shuffled on into the shop, while I raced silently to the little room which had been her father's study, and which yet contained his library.

Hopping from one shelf to another, I scanned the books' titles.

At last, far over in one corner, I found a dusty volume which looked as if it might contain the information I sought. Tugging at its back with my beak, I jerked it down. Searched over the table of contents.

All that day I studied. And when the

madame went out into the garden with evening, my heart was so pounding with hope and excitement that I could hardly follow her.

The old woman raised to her lips the glass of liquid which would, in a few moments, transform her into the glorious, radiant Shayla. Already anticipation glowed in her eyes.

And already, too, an aura of evil was settling over that little patio. My breath came faster. This was the night of the full moon! The night of my execution! I shuddered as I thought of how little time I had.

But this was no time to worry! Hurdled I scuttled over to the crevice where I had hidden the eyestone. Clawed it out. Half-jumped, half-flew my way to a perch in a small tree.

Slowly the potion worked its miracle. Shayla stood before me, breath-takingly lovely, yet loathesome. The soul of sin. A sorceress, ready for her evil rites. She raised her slim young arms toward the rising moon. Stretched as if trying to reach it.

"Oh, my goddess! Tonight I am so weary! And so afraid—"

She moved toward the stone seat that also formed her altar. Sitting down, she stretched again, then sat staring up at the glory of the moon.

"Tonight I pay you blood tribute, oh my goddess! I give you life—and yet, I am afraid. . . ."

Now was my chance!

The tree in which I sat was only a few feet in front of the girl. With infinite caution, I wedged the eyestone into a small crotch. Manipulated it until the moonlight would shine on it.

A ray struck through the translucent stone. Set uncanny fires alight within it. Made it gleam like a great, all-seeing eye in the gathering darkness of the garden.

I glided to Shayla's side. Before me,

a little to the left of the girl and about a foot above her eye-level, the eyestone sparkled in the gloom.

A PRAYER in my heart, I gently nudged Shayla's head.

Ever so slightly, she turned. Her weary eyes, half-closed, caught the reddish gleam of the talisman.

"Like an eye, it is," she murmured. "Like a little eye of light in the darkness, my lovelies."

My bird-voice was but a whisper:

"Watch the light, Shayla. Watch it. Keep your eyes upon it."

Over and over I repeated it, while the girl's gaze clung to the shining stone.

"Oh, my eyes are tired!" she sighed sleepily.

"Watch the light, Shayla. Watch the light. Your eyes are growing weary. They are very tired . . . oh, so tired . . . but do not close them yet, Shayla . . . watch the light . . . watch it closely . . . watch it . . . your eyes are getting tired, lovely one . . . very tired . . . you can hardly hold them open . . . they are so heavy . . . they want to close . . . they are drooping, Shayla . . . your eyes are tired, and they want to close, and your head is heavy, and you want to sleep. Yes, Shayla, your eyes are tired—"

Softly, I whispered the words. Close to her ear. Repeating the suggestions over and over again, while her lids drooped as if they were weighted down with lead.

"Oh, but your eyes are tired, Shayla!" I droned monotonously. "You want to close them . . . to go to sleep . . . they are very heavy . . . the longer you watch the light, the heavier they become . . . you are tired . . . so tired . . . very, very tired . . . you want to go to sleep . . ."

"They are tired, Shayla . . . your eyes are tired . . . close your eyes . . . close them, now . . . let them fall shut . . . tight shut . . . go to sleep, Shayla. *Go to sleep!*"

I murmured on, slowly, softly, monotonously; repeating, suggesting; suggesting, repeating.

The girl's eyes closed. Her head swayed forward until her chin rested on her chest. She was asleep . . .

Sleep!

Yes, that was the slim hope on which I was staking everything. My last hope. Sleep, brought on my suggestion—

Hypnosis!

Slowly, then, and cautiously, I moved ahead. Deepened her trance. Suggested simple feats for her to perform. Increased her receptivity bit by bit. Persuaded her to accede to me in one thing after another.

And then, at last—

" . . . You want to make magic tonight, Shayla . . . you want to make strange magic . . . you want to transform the white bird back into a man . . . he is your friend, Shayla . . . he is like your father . . . he is your friend . . . you must make him a man again . . . you want to transform him . . . you must begin now, Shayla . . . you must get the lamps, and the potions, and the book . . . you must prepare carefully, Shayla . . ."

**M**INUTE by minute, hour by hour, I worked. Slowly, a step at a time, I outlined what she was to do. Impressed upon her that she must return me to the world of men.

Could she do it?

My brain mulled that question until my head ached as if a hammer were pounding a measured beat upon it.

Could she do it?

Science would say that she could not.

Savants would sneer at my naivete, and declare that the acts a hypnotic subject will perform are limited and simple. Psychologists would stare in amazement at the thought of my presumption in even trying.

For, after all, what did I have to work with? Here I was—a talking bird. My knowledge of hypnotism was limited to one day's study of an out-of-date volume written by some mad warlock. My equipment consisted of a voice, will-power, and—for a focal point to concentrate my subject's attention—a voodoo doctor's talisman.

Could she do it?

The odds were a million to one against it.

Then why did I try?

I wondered, myself. And the only answer I could find was that hope does spring eternal in the human breast—even though that breast be covered with feathers.

There was that thing in me that would not let me die a sacrifice without a last-ditch fight. You can call it courage; you can call it cowardice. That does not matter. But the thing was there. It made me try—

Shayla moved as in a dream. Carefully, precisely, she made her preparations, as if an inner voice were prompting her, directing her.

Yet her lovely face wore that devil's mask that marked her for the witch she was. Even in the trance, her every move was alive with the evil rhythm.

She brought me, at last, a broad-mouthed beaker, full to the brim with a substance that smelled like the broth of hell. But I drank it down as best I could, and only hoped that she had brewed it right.

A strange hush settled over the garden as the work wore on. The birds were silent, and even the leaves paused in their ceaseless swaying.

The moon hung low, now—and it was veiled with a blood-red haze, until it looked like a blob of gore in the blackness of the night.

Shayla arranged the lamps around the great stone seat. They were in a new pattern this time, one I had not seen before.

She brought me another thick, unpleasant liquid. As she set it down, she spoke in a queer, strained voice.

"Drink, my little one!" she coaxed. "You need fire in your veins to heat your blood!"

Slowly, I drank. But my brain was seething with an agony of indecision.

Was Shayla in a trance—or was this merely some new way to mock me? Some new trick to lead me to another frightful doom?

After all, was there not another man of whom she had told me? A man, turned to a bird, as I had been. She had changed him back, yes. And his body had returned to him—but his mind was gone, and he wandered through the streets of the *Vieux Carré* until the police found him and locked him away.

**I SHUDDERED**, and suddenly panic was upon me. No! I would not go on! I would turn back—die a sacrifice if necessary! I cried out a command to halt.

But no sound came!

I was too late! The potions had taken effect! I was paralyzed, helpless, unable even to speak!

And now, in that queer, strained voice, Shayla began to chant.

My eyes were blurring, my brain reeling. Shayla's face dimmed before me, then grew again to monstrous proportions, like a lovely ogre hovering above me. Her body swayed; my own responded with a jerking spasm of strange, unholy lust. Her chant boomed

in my ears like the roar of the waves on a rockbound coast.

Was it delirium that seized me after that? Or was it, perhaps, that those hideous creatures of whom the wizards speak—the jinni, the elementals, all that ghoulish host of darkness—actually exist, and that night came and were revealed to me by the power of Shayla's potion?

Be that as it may; *something* came to me, in body or through my drug-distorted mind. Horrible creatures, they were, some with malevolent, leering faces and some with no faces at all. They clutched my body with invisible hands. Tore me limb from limb. Divided me, cell by cell, into the original atoms which had formed me. And all the time I screamed and shouted and begged for mercy; but no sound came from my frozen throat.

Then blackness swept over me in awful, pain-straight waves. I was falling through space. Falling . . . falling . . . falling . . .

*Crash!*

The heavens split wide. Scarlet lightning speared down. Its bolt crashed through my tortured skull. Exploded in my brain—

*Crash!*

I jerked like an epileptic in convulsion, then lay still. My eyes slowly opened.

Shayla still stood before me—and the evil had gone out of her. Her eyes were wide and frightened. Her nude body was trembling as an aspen's leaves. She was a picture of panic-stricken bewilderment.

And I—

I sprawled, a man, stark naked on the rude stone seat! . . .

Shayla is in the garden as I write these words. She is playing with those brilliant-plumaged birds she loves so well.

But she was not the sorceress I knew.

No; all that is gone. For the very first thing I did after regaining human form was to gather up and burn every dark volume on the occult, every fragment of magical paraphernalia, that I could find within that ill-omened building's walls.

And onto the charred ground I poured the entire supply of the weird drug that enabled Shayla to transform herself into the ancient, perverse character of Madame Bercamier. That done, I began the girl's re-education.

NIGHT after night I led her into hypnosis' sleep. Talked to her. Explained to her. Persuaded her. Raked the superstitions and inhibitions and phobias and memories from her subconscious mind. Gave her post-hypnotic suggestions that she discuss

these things with me later, after awakening from her trance, to clear up any lingering doubts.

It was not too difficult. Her fear of men and of the world was quickly overcome. Actually, she was rather fascinated by both. Only the easily-disproved teachings of her father had held her back. Today she is my wife.

The birds are all that remain to remind her of her youth's black days. There is nothing to be done about them, for their minds are gone, and to return them to human form would be far more cruel than to let them live happily on in Shayla's garden, adoring her as she does them.

And just between us, I am much more happy to have my wife—young and beautiful and passionate as she is—adored by birds than by a throng of human suitors!

## SERVICE DELUXE

THE fact that salmon always return to the place of their birth to spawn their young has proved to be a headache for both the salmon industry and the United States Bureau of Reclamation.

Each year the salmon run up the Columbia River is a great saga of millions of huge salmon fighting their way through turbulent waters to reach the headwaters, spawn their young, and die. The young then go to the ocean to grow. In five years they start their pilgrimage up the Columbia River to spawn their young and die, completing their life cycle.

For hundreds of years this run has been going on against the obstacles of nature which the salmon have been able to overcome. But, today, man has built huge dams—Bonneville and Grand Coulee—to harness the power in the mighty Columbia River. These obstacles, the salmon could not overcome without help. The salmon industry spent huge sums to build fish ladders to help the salmon past Bonneville Dam, but it could do nothing to get them past Grand Coulee.

It seemed that the salmon industry on the Columbia River was doomed for the salmon would not spawn unless they reached the streams above Grand Coulee and thus there would be no new generations.

Not knowing how to combat the problem themselves, the salmon canneries turned to the United States Government. Experts in the United States Bureau of Reclamation studied the problem from

every conceivable angle and decided at last that the only solution was to transport the salmon past Grand Coulee in huge trucks. To start with, eight specially constructed trucks were purchased and more will be added as the need arises.

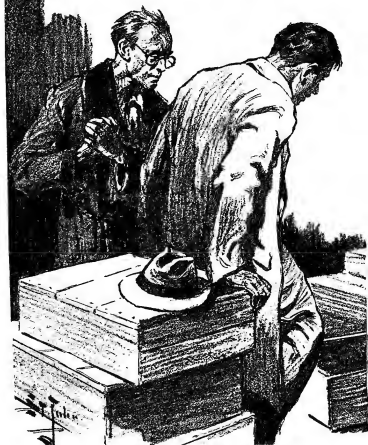
The trucks can carry from 30 to 50 salmon at a time without harm past Grand Coulee Dam. Each truck is equipped with a 1000 gallon tank that is filled with Columbia River water and constantly replenished with oxygen to keep the salmon alive. The tank is completely insulated to protect the salmon from the effects of the quickly changing temperature outside which varies from 108 degrees to as low as 30 degrees. Each truck carries about a ton of cracked ice which is gradually emptied into the tank to accustom the salmon to the cold water they will find in the Wenatchee River and Icicle Creek where they will spawn.

The entire inside of the tank is perfectly smooth and will be filled to the top so that the water cannot move violently and throw the salmon against the side of the tank.

Each year the trucks will collect the salmon from the traps below the Grand Coulee, hustle them at 50 miles per hour to unblocked streams and ponds above the Dam where they can spawn and die, and then go back for more salmon. In this way, millions of salmon will continue to spawn their young so that Americans everywhere will not have to go without their fancy salmon salads and patties in the future.

# PLOT OF GOLD

by GERALD VANCE



A gold ingot dropped from the machine



**It was the alchemists' dream come true—a way to make gold from base metals. But this machine even made gold from nothing!**

**W**HEN I arrived in Chicago one of the first things I did was to call Leander Leeds. I hadn't seen or heard from him since we'd graduated from college five years before, but I'd never forgotten his skinny, serious, bespectacled features or his burning desire to become the Einstein of the chemical world.

He'd always been a rather interesting character to me and I had meant to keep in touch with him, but things just hadn't worked out that way. Now, with a few days off from the hectic confusion of the Washington press bureau for which I labored, I determined to look him up.

He took his time answering the phone. I was ready to hang up when Central's buzzing was interrupted.

"Hello," a scared, squeaky voice said.

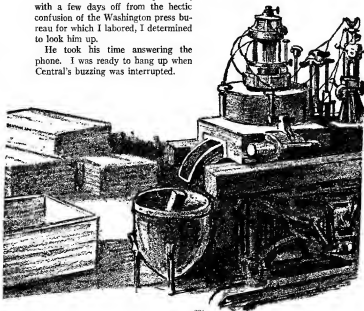
"Hello, yourself," I said. I recognized Leander's voice, but I was puzzled by its overtone of strained terror.

"You must have the wrong number," he said. His voice was little more than a frightened squeak.

"This is Leander Leeds' residence, isn't it?" I demanded.

"N—no. I mean y—es."

"Make up your mind," I snapped



into the phone. I was getting a little irritated with this cat and mouse business. "I want to talk to Leander Leeds."

"About what?" the voice on the opposite end of the line said with a sort of frantic desperation.

"Hell!" I exploded. "Do I have to fill out a questionnaire to talk to him? I—"

I stopped. There had been a definite click on the other end. The phone was dead. I banged it into its cradle and swore eloquently. I said a great number of sulfurous and uncomplimentary things about Leander Leeds and his immediate ancestors before I calmed down enough to think rationally.

I lit a cigarette and frowned at the phone. Something was damned peculiar here. I was certain that I *had* been talking to Leander Leeds, but I couldn't figure out any excuse for his actions, which were, to put it mildly, strange as the very devil.

What had he been afraid of?

There was no answer to that question. I stood up and paced the floor and the more I worried the problem the more curious I became.

Finally I came to a stop in the middle of the room. I pointed a firm finger at my reflection in the full-length mirror.

"You," I said very distinctly, "are on a vacation. It is, I might remind you, your first in five years. Enjoy yourself, see some good plays, investigate the better bars and let your hair down generally. Okay, there's something screwy about this Leander Leeds set-up. What's that to you? Poking your nose into someone else's private grief leads to trouble all the way 'round. Forget it! To hell with Leander Leeds!"

That didn't help. I was nibbling my nails ten seconds later. Finally I realized what I had to do. I scribbled down

Leander's address on a piece of paper and walked out of my room. I had to see Leander Leeds.

WHEN I paid off the cab driver in front of the address I had copied from the phone book, I was pleasantly surprised by the luxurious neighborhood. Leander's address was an immense apartment hotel, very exclusive and very swanky.

My bewilderment increased slightly. How could anyone living in such lush surroundings have anything serious to worry about?

I walked across the expansive, marble lobby to the desk. The clerk, a nattily dressed young man with a frigidly impersonal stare, nodded slightly to me.

"I wish to see Mr. Leeds," I said.

"Whom shall I say is calling, sir?"

"Matt Harlow. He's not expecting me but I think it's all right."

The clerk sat down before a switch board and plugged in a line. As he waited he glanced sideways at me and I noticed a certain suspicious curiosity in his gaze.

I began to feel slightly furtive, for no good reason at all. I resisted an impulse to turn up my coat collar and pull down the brim of my hat.

After several minutes the clerk disconnected the line and shook his head.

"Mr. Leeds does not answer, sir," he said.

"Doesn't answer? You mean he's not in?"

"He's in all right," the clerk said, "but he just doesn't answer his phone."

I pondered this for a moment and it didn't make sense. But then nothing connected with Leander Leeds seemed to make any particular sense. However my curiosity was additionally sharpened.

"How do you know he's in?" I asked

the clerk. "Couldn't he have stepped out for a moment?"

"He could have," the clerk said, smiling tolerantly, "but he didn't. As a matter of fact Mr. Leeds never leaves his apartment."

"Never?"

"Never. For the past three weeks Mr. Leeds has not left his apartment."

"Why?" I asked, somewhat groggily. This thing was enough to drive a person batty.

The clerk's manner stiffened.

"It is our policy," he said, "to respect the privacy of our tenants. If Mr. Leeds chooses to remain in his apartment he undoubtedly has sufficient reasons for doing so. It is, after all, his affair."

"Okay, okay," I said, a trifle fed-up with his supercilious attitude; "what's his apartment number? I'll go up and see him."

The clerk looked doubtful, but finally he gave me the number of Leander's apartment and I headed for the elevators.

Leander's apartment was on the fifteenth floor. I got off the elevator and found his door without difficulty.

**I** BANGED the brass knocker twice and waited.

There was no sound from within the apartment. I lit a cigarette and paced up and down before the door, my heels sinking a full inch into the heavy carpet.

I stopped and banged the knocker again. Then I rapped sharply with my knuckles on the creamy enamel of the door.

A full minute passed and then I heard a furtive footstep on the other side of the door. An instant after that, a squeaky voice said, "Who is it?"

This time I definitely recognized the voice as Leander's.

"It's Matt Harlow," I said in a good loud voice. "Open up. What the devil's wrong with you?"

Cautiously and slowly the door was opened about five inches at which point a heavy burglar chain stopped it. Then, in this aperture appeared a thin, pale, bespectacled face, topped with scant, straw-colored hair. Leander Leeds!

"Is it really you, Matt?" he gasped. His voice was high and squeaky and scared. It had always been high and squeaky but the tone of fright was something new.

"Certainly it's me," I said. "Can't you see that for yourself?"

His wide, pale eyes behind their enormous cheaters shifted over my shoulder and then up and down the hall.

"Are you alone?" he whispered.

"Of course," I said. "Did you expect me to bring along an army?"

He didn't appear to hear me. His eyes were still flicking furtively about the corridor, as if he expected Boris Karloff to make an appearance any second.

Finally he looked at me and there were tears of relief in his eyes.

"Gosh, I'm glad to see you," he said in a broken, husky voice.

I looked down at the burglar chain.

"It doesn't look that way," I said.

"What's the matter with you? I haven't got leprosy and I'm not here to steal the family's gold."

His face turned a shade whiter, if that were possible, and his trembling hand fluttered to his brow.

"Please," he gasped in a stricken voice, "don't mention that word to me. I'm liable to go mad. Maybe I am mad already. I don't know."

He was in a bad way.

"Take it easy," I said. "Things can't be that bad. If you're in trouble maybe I can help you out a little."

"Trouble?" he moaned. "That's hardly the word for it. Somebody will have to invent a new word to describe the kind of a mess I'm in."

His fingers began fumbling with the burglar chain. He seemed strangely excited.

"Maybe you can help me," he said tensely. "You were always good at getting people out of jams back in school. Maybe . . . If I don't at least talk to someone I'll go insane."

HE opened the door and when I stepped into the front room of his apartment he slammed it and I heard him adjusting the chain and throwing the night emergency locks.

I glanced around the large living room and my eyebrows raised slightly. There wasn't anything wrong with the room; in fact it was magnificently furnished and quite swanky, but . . .

It was practically filled with packing cases, huge, cumbersome crates with solidly nailed-down tops.

"Well, well," I said. "Moving day?"

Leander looked gloomily at the boxes and, as he stood beside me, I got my first good look at him. He had always been skinny but now he was thin to the point of emaciation.

He was wearing a loose dark dressing gown over a dirty shirt and baggy, unpressed trousers. He looked as if he'd been sleeping in the outfit for a week. His hands were twined together nervously and the harried desperate look was creeping back into his eyes.

I pointed to the crates.

"What goes?" I asked.

"Come with me," he said. "I want to show you something. I can't tell you about it. You have to see it for yourself to believe it."

He led me through the dining-room and I noticed in passing that it too was filled with large, sealed packing cases.

We walked down a dark corridor and finally came to a stop before a closed door.

Leander fished a key from his pocket and unlocked the door.

"This is my laboratory," he said.

I followed him through the door and he switched a light on, flooding the large room with bright illumination.

*This* room, too, was filled with packing crates but they were open and I saw that they were about half-filled with dull bronze metal bars about three inches thick and twelve inches long.

In the center of the room was an intricate machine mounted on a low table. As I was examining it I heard a metallic clink and I saw that a bar of the dull metal had dropped into a receptacle in the front of the machine.

Leander walked to the machine, picked up the metal bar and, with a sad sigh, tossed it into one of the open packing crates.

I studied the machine carefully. It was about two feet square and constructed of brilliantly gleaming metal. The lower half was simply a stout square box with a slot-like receptacle on the side facing me. The upper half of the machine was like nothing I had ever seen before. Filament-like wires twined together and disappeared into the interior of the machine in a sort of orderly disorder.

I heard another metallic clank. Glancing down at the machine's receptacle I saw that another dull bronze bar had dropped into place.

Leander picked this bar up, too, and tossed it into one of the packing crates. He seemed more dejected and listless than ever.

"See that?" he asked moodily.

"Yes. What's the idea?"

HE looked at me for an instant and then he sighed heavily. His large

weak eyes were damp.

"It's no use," he said. His voice was anguished and despairing. "You'll never believe me. You'll think I'm mad."

I put a hand on his skinny shoulder.

"I came here with the idea of helping you," I said. "At least give me a chance."

My words seemed to lend him a little courage. He straightened his shoulders and took a deep breath.

"All right," he said. "I—"

A metallic clank interrupted him. He stooped and removed the bronze-colored bar, but he didn't toss it into a packing crate. He held it in his hands.

"Matt," he said slowly, "do you know what this machine is doing?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," I said. "I'm no engineer. Why?"

Leander's fingers tightened nervously about the metal bar. A beady nervous perspiration popped out on his pale forehead.

"Matt," he gulped, "this machine is making gold!"

I didn't get it right away.

"That's nice," I said, "but—"

"Didn't you hear me? Leander cried, grabbing my arm. "*It's making gold!* Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Nothing but gold, gold, gold."

I stared at him and gradually the meaning of his words filtered into my brain.

"Gold?" I said. I looked rather stupidly from the machine to Leander. "Gold, eh?"

"Yes, yes," he cried. He shoved the bar he was holding into my hands. "See for yourself. Solid gold."

I took the bar and examined it. It was heavy. It looked like gold. Who knows? It might be gold. I snapped myself to with a jerk.

I shoved the bar back to Leander.

"You're nuttier than a fruit cake," I

told him. "What kind of a fairy story are you handing me? Even in Washington I've never heard anything to top it. A gold machine! Working twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Overtime for Sundays, I suppose?"

I was pretty sore and, as a result, pretty sarcastic.

Leander made no defense. He simply tossed the metal bar into a packing case and sighed mournfully.

"I told you," he said tragically. "I knew you wouldn't believe me."

He turned away and his skinny shoulders shook.

"The whole thing is simply absurd," I said, defensively. A metal bar dropped into the receptacle and I picked it up automatically. I glanced at the machine in irritation.

"Why don't you shut this damned thing off?" I demanded. "It'll drive you crazy if you don't."

"It is driving me crazy," Leander said wildly, "but I can't turn it off. There *isn't* any way to turn it off."

I STARTED to say something, then

I changed my mind. Leander was hysterical, but there was no mistaking the sincerity in his voice. I looked dubiously at the half-dozen or so half-filled packing cases and thought of the dozens more piled throughout the apartment. Maybe there *wasn't* any way to turn the machine off. But that was silly. I'd be worse than Leander if I didn't watch myself.

"Now, Leander," I said, in my most soothing voice, "suppose you tell me the whole story."

I felt it would do him good to talk. Also I knew if I didn't get the whole story I was liable to go bats myself.

Leander turned and faced me and his features were lined and haggard. His prominent Adam's apple moved in a sad gulp.

"All right," he said tonelessly, "I'll tell you the whole story. I invented a machine that would make gold, that's all there is to it. I had the idea in college and I've worked on nothing else since I graduated."

He waved a tired hand toward a paper-stuffed filing case in the corner.

"The formula is over there. It took me six months just to copy after I had figured it out. Building the machine was a year's job. Four months ago it started to work."

He paused and sighed heavily, despairingly.

"I was able to sell the first few bars. I moved here, built this laboratory. I was going to enjoy life." He laughed bitterly. "But the machine wouldn't stop. There isn't any way to stop it. The gold kept piling up. Finally I had these packing cases delivered here and I've been storing the gold for the last two months. I can't leave the apartment. I can't eat, I can't sleep, I can't do anything."

The machine disgorged another metal bar. Leander picked it up, threw it into a packing case. I felt some of my doubt slipping away.

After all the machine had made a half dozen bars of metal while I was standing in the room. I scratched my head.

"Leander," I said weakly, "is this stuff really gold? I mean, are you sure?"

"Of course it's gold. I've had it analyzed by the best authorities in the city."

He sagged against one of the packing cases and covered his eyes with his hands.

"God!" he groaned.

I frowned. "Well, what's your problem? If all these cases are filled with gold I'd say you're in a pretty nice spot. You're about the only man I know

who'd be annoyed by a super-abundance of the most precious metal in the world."

"You don't understand!" Leander cried tragically. "What can I do with it? I can't sell it. It's against the law to hoard it. And I'm running out of space."

I lit a cigarette and started pacing. What a ridiculous situation! It was too fantastic to be funny.

"JUST a minute," I said suddenly, "there's nothing for you to worry about. You haven't done anything criminal. You've just invented a rather peculiar machine, that's all. They won't hang you for that."

"You still don't understand. I can't turn this thing over to the government."

"Why not?"

Leander waved his arms frantically.

"Think of what would happen. It would make our gold reserve valueless. Our entire monetary system would be destroyed. With all the other problems the government has, I can't dump this into its lap. It might cripple our war effort. It might drive all the banks out of business. There's no telling what might happen, not only in this country but all over the world, if the people realized that the value of all money had been undermined."

I hadn't thought of those things. They were worth thinking about. I started pacing again.

Another gold bar dropped into the slot. I started slightly. The damn thing *did* get on your nerves. The effect was probably something like the Chinese water torture. I felt a new pity for Leander. He'd been listening to those bars of gold fall for the last four months. No wonder he looked about ready to fly to pieces.

An idea occurred to me.

"Why don't you get rid of some of

the gold?" I asked. "That would relieve the congestion here and in the meantime you might think of some way to stop the machine."

"I've tried," Leander said dismally. "After the first month I started taking an armful out every night and throwing it into the river. That helped a little, but then one night a policeman almost caught me. I probably looked suspicious and he started after me. I barely had time to get rid of the gold bars and duck into an alley. It was close. If he'd caught me the jig would have been up."

"How about giving it away?" I suggested hopefully.

Leander threw up his hands in despair.

"We can't do that. Can you imagine what would happen if we stood on street corners giving bars of gold away?"

I could. That was out. I started pacing again and lit another cigarette.

"We've got to do something in a hurry," Leander said. "In a little while it may be too late."

"Why?"

"I'll show you."

He led the way down the corridor to the dining-room. I noticed that the dining-room floor creaked suspiciously as we stepped on it. Leander stood in the center of the room and stared gloomily about the piled-up crates.

"This floor is about ready to go," he said.

"What?" I cried. I jumped back into the corridor. This was getting too much for me.

"I said this floor is about ready to give way," Leander said calmly. He pointed to the intersection of the wall and floor. "Notice how the floor has sagged? It's dropped a full inch already. This amount of gold is pretty heavy."

I LOOKED and saw that Leander was right. I swallowed slowly. This was serious.

"We've got to do something," I said.

"Sure," Leander said, "but what?"

"I have an idea," I said. "Do you have any paint handy?"

"I think there's a can or two in the pantry," Leander answered.

"Get it," I said crisply, "there's no time to wait. Then call a junk man."

My plan was simple. We could paint the top layers in the boxes and then sell it as scrap metal. It wasn't such a hot idea but it was all I could think of. At least it would relieve the pressure on the dining-room floor and then we could think of something else.

Leander returned with the paint, a scummy shade of brown. He listened to my plan without much enthusiasm, but he agreed that it was the only thing we could do.

I phoned a scavenger company while Leander ripped the lids of the gold-filled crates. We both pitched in on the paint job and we had barely finished when the back doorbell rang.

Leander started like a flushed rabbit.

"Who's that?"

"I'll get it," I said. I walked through the kitchen and opened the back door. Two large gentlemen in overalls and blue denim jumpers were standing there.

"We're from the junk yard," one of them said. "You got some scrap iron here?"

"Why, yes," I said, "come right in."

"Thanks, bud. We thought it was some kind of a gag at first. This is the first pick-up we ever made on the Gold Coast."

I winced. Couldn't anybody talk without mentioning gold? I began to realize how Midas must have felt.

The two men followed me into the dining-room. I felt my nerves jump

as their additional bulk was added to the already over-strained floor. We made a deal in a hurry. Already another idea was sizzling in my head and I wanted to talk to Leander about it. While the men carted the crates out of the room and down the back steps, I turned this idea over and over and I could find nothing wrong with it.

When the men had gone, taking with them five of the crates and the danger of an immediate debacle had been averted, I turned excitedly to Leander.

"Our problem is solved," I announced with a pardonable touch of drama. "You will be bothered no longer with your gold machine."

Leander's pale eyes lit up with a spark of hope. His fingers trembled excitedly.

"What have you figured out?" he demanded.

"The simplest thing in the world," I said. "We're going to ship it away."

"Ship it away!" Leander echoed. His voice was a disappointed bleat. "What good will that do?"

"It is not merely shipping it away that will solve our problem," I said, "but *where* we ship the gold machine is the master stroke that will relieve us of all responsibilities."

"Well, where are we going to ship it?"

"Fort Knox, Kentucky," I said dramatically.

"WHAT good—" Leander stopped in the middle of the sentence and gazed at me with dawning admiration. "I see," he murmured. "The heart of the government's gold reserve is at Fort Knox."

"Exactly," I said. "They can keep this machine a secret; in fact they'll have to. They get a steady supply of gold to add to their stock and your problem is solved."

"You're a genius," Leander said fervently.

"Quite probably," I said. "Now let's get moving. I'll phone an express company and you start crating the gold machine. I'll be back to give you a hand in a minute."

I strode into the front room and made the call. Then I walked back through the apartment to Leander's laboratory. Just as I reached the door I heard a loud metallic crash within the room.

I stepped into the room and found Leander picking himself up from the floor. The gold machine was lying in a heap beside the table on which it had rested.

"What happened?" I asked.

"I stumbled," Leander explained apologetically. "I picked up the machine and my foot slipped and I fell. I don't think it hurt the machine."

"Unfortunately, it probably didn't," I said.

I dragged an empty crate to the center of the room and, with Leander's help, hoisted the gold machine into it. We wadded newspapers on all four sides and then nailed a top onto the crate.

"That'll do it," I said. "Your worries are pretty close to being over."

We paced up and down the floor until the truck driver from the express company arrived. The machine wasn't very heavy but the express charges came to fourteen dollars and twenty six cents. I paid it cheerfully.

Leander and I lifted the crate to the shoulders of the expressman and he staggered down the back stairs with it, taking the gold machine out of our lives forever.

Leander was so excited and jubilant that it was positively pathetic. I felt fine too, except that I was developing what seemed to be a bad toothache. I



mentioned this to Leander and he went into the laboratory to get me something for it.

He wasn't gone more than twenty seconds before I heard his shrill shout blasting through the apartment.

I forgot my toothache and dashed toward the laboratory.

Leander was standing in the middle of the room, gazing wildly at the crates lining the wall.

"What the hell's the matter?" I demanded.

"Look!" he pointed to the crates with a trembling finger.

I stared and my heart seemed to stop. My stomach turned a leisurely flip-flop.

*For the crates were completely empty!*

THE gold bars, with which the crates had been more than half-filled, had vanished into thin air.

"What happened?" I asked weakly. I had the feeling however that I would rather not know.

"I'm afraid to even guess," Leander whispered. He stared at me, stricken and frightened. "I think the gold ma-

chine started working in reverse, decomposing the gold it had created. Maybe the fall did it."

"You're talking nonsense," I said. "There's a perfectly logical explanation—" I stopped and very slowly raised my hand to my mouth. My finger touched the tooth that had started aching. The gold filling was gone!

"I think you're right, Leander," I said very quietly. "Undoubtedly the gold machine is working in reverse."

"And we sent it to Fort Knox," he said in a tragic whisper. "What will happen to the twelve billions of dollars in gold the government has stored there?"

I sat down and put my head in my hands.

"If you don't mind, Leander," I said. "I would prefer not to think about that just now."

"But what will the government do?"

I lifted my head from my hands. I thought about that and my spirits began to rise. The greatest government in the world shouldn't have any difficulty with this problem. Hell, they'd probably never even miss the twelve billion dollars.

## AN AIR-TIGHT RACKET

HISTORY is filled with examples of men who have become huge landlords by duping their countrymen, but Tehiptilla of ancient Iraq had a system which made all the land-grabbers look like amateurs.

His plan was very simple and within the letter of the law according to a translation of a clay tablet being exhibited at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

Dr. Ignace Gelb, research associate of the institute, explained how the plan worked. According to the customs of Ancient Iraq, then called Mesopotamia, the king would reward his soldiers for their acts of bravery in combat by giving them gifts of land. The only string tied to the gift was that the soldier could not sell his land. Most of the soldiers, who had no interest in becoming farmers or landowners, were faced with

the knotty problem of getting rid of a "white elephant."

Tehiptilla saw a loop-hole in the gift which would solve the soldier's problem and make himself rich. Although the soldiers could not sell the land, the king permitted them to give it to an heir.

Thus, Tehiptilla had himself adopted by hundreds of soldiers in his home town of Nuzi. Being their heir, the soldiers would then "give" their land to Tehiptilla and he in turn would give his foster fathers a "gift" of money which was more useful to the soldiers.

The plan was a complete success even though in some cases Tehiptilla was many years older than his "father," and when he died he was considered the largest landowner and richest man in the whole town of Nuzi.

# READER'S PAGE

## SEPTEMBER ISSUE REALLY NEAT

Sirs:

The September issue of *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES* was really neat. This is how I rate the stories: "Angel With Four Faces" . . . (Neat); "Outcasts Of Eternity" . . . (Super); "Infinite Invasion" . . . (Good); "Goddess Of The Fifth Plane" . . . ; "Deadly Yappers" . . . ; "Son Of A Witch" . . . (Keep up this kind of story); "The Bottle Imp" . . . (Good story); "That Dreadful Night" . . . (Spooky); "Scarlet Rollers" . . . ; "Resurrection From Hell" . . . ; "When Destiny Dealt" . . . (This one was terrible).

CHESTER FIRESTEIN,  
722 N. Maple Drive,  
Beverly Hills, Calif.

*We're glad you like this issue, Chet. But we think you'll like the current one even better. We've really given this one a lot of attention. Let us know how Bond's novel strikes you.—Ed.*

## MORE ABOUT GAS

Sirs:

I would like to add my comments for what they are worth to the discussion as to the respective deadliness of Mustard gas and Lewisite.

While it is true that Lewisite is slightly more toxic than Mustard (roughly one-third more toxic) and is areneal in nature, which further introduces the danger of systematic poisoning, its value as a major war gas is considerably reduced by lack of stability. Its rate of hydrolysis is extremely high and a good fall of morning dew can be enough to completely hydrolyze all of the Lewisite in a gassed area. The hydrolyzed product is also poisonous but since it has negligible vapor pressure, no poisoning can occur through the respiratory tract even if the mask is not worn.

The gas mask gives perfect protection to the face and lungs against the vesicant (blistering) gases. Clothing will not prevent painful and often fatal burns from either Mustard or Lewisite in a liquid condition. However, most woolen clothing will give perfect protection, for a limited time, against the vapors of both these agents.

Protective clothing is in existence which renders almost perfect protection against these agents to the unmasked parts of the body.

To take up the matter of persistency of these agents. Persistency is a very variable term and the persistency of Mustard gas may be relatively short under ideal weather and topographical conditions,

i.e. hot, humid and rainy and in exposed, open terrain.

Sergeant Baron says that one out of every ten men in a decontamination squad is a casualty. I dare say that this one man is only a casualty and that the rate of infantry fatalities is above that figure. I then fail to see why the name suicide squad is attached to a decontamination detail.

ROBERT L. WEEKS,  
2nd Lieut. CWS,  
Harding Field, La.  
Base Chemical Office.

*Your letter is very much appreciated, Lieutenant Weeks. Since we first published the article on gas, we've had this question argued from all sides, and we feel that we've really been able to expose the truth about both these gases to the satisfaction of all. It is debate of this kind that makes us rather proud of our Reader's Page.—Ed.*

## SOME QUESTIONS

Sirs:

Why don't you get Finlay instead of letting *Amazing Stories* cop him for the "Test Tube Girl"? His place is in *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES*. Have you ever thought of having him do a cover for you?

Most of your cover illustrations are swell. Especially McCauley, Smith, and Fuqua. Boy oh boy, can those guys draw! Fuqua is swell for inside illustrations too. But when McCauley gets good on the inside, it's rapture!

Nice going on your new size. But could you improve the quality of at least the major part of your stories? Heck, it seems as if most of the stories are just average stuff. Wilcox, O'Brien, Cabot, Williams, Farnsworth, etc., are still contributing, but then you put in some stories from guys like Patton and I say to myself: "Why don't the other boys have that quality even three-fourths of the time?"

Most of your authors invariably use an old theme with something added or a new twist to it. That is all right sometimes when a really new freshness can be found even though the theme is used so often. This freshness may be the author's style, but how about some originality? No superman, no time travel, no invasions, no supreme weapon, no—well, all I can say is if they've used up every subject in this universe, how about creating a new universe?

All in all, though, your magazines are two of

the leading sf and fantasy-fiction mags on my "Leaders" list of six.

GEORGE V. FAIR,  
1029 E. Gutierrez St.,  
Santa Barbara, Calif.

We have got Finlay for *Fantastic*. You'll find him in the December issue illustrating a story by Dwight V. Swain called "Long Remember." And we have more coming up in the future. All in *FA*. How's that strike you? As for a cover, we have thought of it. And we'll drop Mr. Finlay a line and have him submit a few tentative sketches. However, we get so few illustrations from this busy man that we hate to look a gift horse in the mouth. Well, if Patton is your man to improve the quality of the stories, we'll get

more stories from Patton. But honestly, we think these boys you mentioned do some very fine stuff occasionally. As for that new universe, now we have you nailed down. You tell us about one, and describe it, and we'll put it in a story!—Ed.

#### A FAN WHO IS A FAN!

Sirs:

After another month filled with the tense impatience of waiting, finally the day came and yesterday I trotted down to the newsstand as fast as my little legs would carry me with a nice new shiny quarter clutched tightly in my grimy hand. I looked around anxiously; was I to be disappointed? No, there it lay all covered but one corner by other magazines that the thoughtless news dealer had placed on top of it. Perhaps he

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was saving it for a friend. Before he had a chance  
to discover I had taken it, I tossed my two-bits  
in his general direction and disappeared out of  
the door, followed by a cloud of old papers, dust,  
and other miscellaneous debris. What was it that  
I had snatched from his possession? That's an  
easy one to answer; the September issue of  
FANTASTIC ADVENTURES!

Eerose home I humped into pedestrians,  
parked cars, lamp posts, and what have you while  
poring eagerly over the magazine to see what it  
had to offer this month.

First of all, what a cover! Ah, McCauley and  
his Mac Girl. What a booster to public morale!  
I drooled with anticipation of the story that ac-  
companied this morsel of beauty. The Good Old  
Days were never like this; imagine clever stories  
in one magazine. Good old FA is beginning to  
assume the proportions of a mail order catalogue.

By this time I have reached home nearly ex-  
hausted from the half-run at which I have pro-  
pelled myself and flopped limply on the floor (I  
had missed the studio-couch at which I aimed  
myself) to read the latest adventures of that Fa-  
mous Pool of Fantasy Fiction, Lefty Feep. I  
should save this, the best part of the mag until  
last, but my will-power is not what it should be.

After I have scanned the whole magazine, I  
turn to the Reader's page to see what these jerks  
who call themselves fans have to crab about this  
time. When I get through wading through this  
mass of complaints, I am lower than a Nazi's  
heel.

Well, here I am wasting valuable papyrus and  
punching large, gaping holes in my typewriter  
ribbon for no good reason at all, so I will sign off.

JACK RECKEL,  
806 McClary Ave.,  
New Castle, Pa.

Reading your letter, Jack, we kinda get the  
idea you like our magazine? Well, there'll be a  
Feep story in each issue for quite some time,  
and we assure you they are all better than the  
last. But you'd better aim at that studio-couch  
a little more accurately. You'll find the wear and  
tear telling on you, and we wouldn't want to lose  
a reader as eager as you are!—En

## HOW CAN WE BE MODEST?

Says:

September *Fantastic Adventures* was undoubt-  
edly the best illustrated and authored book or  
magazine ever published in the field of Fantasy.  
Both covers were without parallel to any I have  
ever seen.

I shan't attempt to rate the stories of this issue  
for they were all wonderfully written and superbly  
carried out.

However, I shall give my ratings of the illus-  
trations, since some were better than others.

1. H. W. McCauley—an artist who will be  
missed, not only because of his style, but also  
since his Mac Girls will no longer adorn your  
covers.

2. Magarian—an artist whose efforts are not fully appreciated by some. Perhaps a cover by this topnotch fantasy illustrator would fix this?

3. Robert Fuqua—the old master of gadgets carries on with much improvement, if that be possible. How about giving him more than one story a month to illustrate? He deserves it.

4. Brady—a touch of originality mixed with Fuqua's old, but never-to-be-forgotten, style resulting in a swell piece of art work.

5. Ned Hadley—if it weren't for the fact that he every once in a while turns in a batch of swell illustrations, as is evidenced in this issue, I'd say to get rid of him.

6. L. Raymond Jones—if he could constantly turn out illustrations as good as that of his in this issue instead of those awful things of his in your last issue I would thoroughly approve of him.

Listed in the following are a few of my wants, most of which would enormously better your magazine.

1. The return of such characters as Fire-Jump; the Eagle Man; Oscar, the Martian Detective; the Whispering Gorilla; Adam Link; Hok.

2. Covers by Magarian, Fuqua, Finlay, and St. John.

3. An explanation why you aren't giving us trimmed edges and make it good!

4. A fantasy club as a regular feature in your magazine, which most of your readers would undoubtedly approve of.

5. One reason, if there is any, why I shouldn't keep up my subscription to *Fantastic Adventures*.

JACK FORTADO,  
Box 314,  
Rodeo, Calif.

*Such praise overwhelms us—with pleasure! As for McCauley, we have the good news that he has been returned to us by Uncle Sam, and is now hard at work on some of the most beautiful covers and interiors we've ever seen. Witness this issue! Wilson tells us Fire-Jump will have another adventure. Oscar came back in the October issue! The Whispering Gorilla, authored this time by David V. Reed, is nearing completion, and it'll be a yarn that'll pin your ears back! Emda Binder promises that Adam Link will return. We haven't heard from Wellman lately, but Hok certainly isn't dead. We have a new gadget cover working by Fuqua. St. John appears quite often on our covers. Magarian does not work in color. Opinion on trimmed edges has always run about evenly divided, and we aren't at all convinced. Individual fantasy clubs exist in many of the larger cities, and also in the smaller towns all over the country. We give them publicity in the correspondence corner any time they want it. As for keeping up your subscription, honestly there just isn't any reason why not!*

Which brings us to the end of the Reader's Page for this month. Drop us a line, readers, and let us know about this issue, particularly Bond's full-length novel.—Ed.

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# PROMETHEUS

By HENRY GADE

**The god who gave fire to man, having stolen it from the workshop forge of Hephaestus.**

(See back cover)

**P**ROMETHEUS was never very popular with the rest of the gods because he was the champion of man, and defended them against their wrath.

He was the son of the Titan Iapetus. His mother was a sea nymph named Clymene, or sometimes Themis. Legend does not seem certain which was his mother, and even mentions other parents.

Zeus, because man had got the better of him, desired to destroy the human race and supplant it with a new and better species in revenge. But Prometheus interfered.

At a meeting of the gods and men at Mecone, for the purpose of deciding which portions of slain animals should go to the gods and which to man, Prometheus resorted to a subterfuge to deceive Zeus. On one side he arranged the best parts of an ox and covered them with offal. On the other side he placed the bones, covered with fat. It was thus that meat was covered in Homeric sacrifices. Zeus, invited to make his choice, chose the fat and found only bones underneath.

Enraged at the trick, he either refused to give the gift of fire to man, or had already given it and withdrew it. Legend is not sure which was the case. Without fire, man would perish, Zeus reasoned.

But Prometheus, still the champion of man, restored the gift of fire to man. There are several versions of how this was accomplished, but the most generally accepted is that of his theft of flame from the workshop of Hephaestus. Having stolen it, he came to Earth and gave it to man. It is this scene which is depicted on the back cover painting by Frank R. Paul.

When Prometheus stole the fire, he concealed it in a hollow fennel stalk. To this day, the fennel stalk is used in Greece to carry fire, mostly as a means of carrying a light.

Another version of how Prometheus got fire tells of holding a rod close to the sun until it ignited, then flying to Earth with it.

When we stop to consider who, or what, Prometheus really was, we must take into debate the multiplicity of legends which tell of his existence. Originally he was a genuine Greek deity, whose province included fire and its industrial applications. His position as a "defender" of man

against harm probably springs from the use of fire to drive away predatory animals. Thus the origin of the belief that Prometheus brought fire to man to compensate him for his lack of fighting teeth and claws and enable him to combat the animal world on a more even footing.

But Prometheus also is a part of the legend of such peoples as the Murri of Gippsland (Australia) and of Europeans and Vedic Indians. Some of these peoples picture him as a bird who brings fire. In each of these legends, his name connotes with the Sanskrit for fire-stick, which gives rise to his consistent identity throughout the world.

However, the legend is common among the races which never heard the word *Pramantha*. Thus we cannot define his existence so universally through etymology.

The truth of the matter may be that Prometheus was not a living figure (god or man) at all, but a natural manifestation of a natural phenomenon. This natural phenomenon more than likely is our old friend, the lightning.

The savage aborigines of Australia apparently got fire from heaven, and the means is thought to be a bird of great swiftness which flies down with flame in its beak. Lightning seems to be that "bird."

Scientists believe that man came to know fire because lightning bolts set it for him, burning down forests, and leaving burning embers for man, in his curiosity, to learn to carry about and preserve as a means of keeping himself warm.

Supporting the theory that Prometheus is nothing other than the lightning, is the fact that legend tells of him bringing fire to man immediately after the Deucalion, the deluge which destroyed most of mankind. It was after the deluge that Zeus took away the gift of fire, so that the few surviving members of mankind would succumb to the beasts.

Prometheus was also credited with the power of making men of clay. How this can be associated with fire is obvious. Among the Greeks, sculpture was an early art, and figures modeled of clay were found to become permanent and hard when treated with fire. Thus, the role of Prometheus as a sculptor.

In any event, this god, of them all, is the least likely to have had a human beginning.

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